

You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance,¹¹ persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.¹² In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,¹³ while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

4 *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge:² Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.³ For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.⁵ But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. (2 Timothy 3:10-4:5)*

Continue in What You have Learned

Is it my imagination, or are we forgetting how to drive in this country? Maybe I'm showing my age, but it sure seems like people are ruder and more aggressive than they were thirty years ago when I first got my driver's license. A few months ago, an older member of our congregation asked, "Did these people even take driver's training?" I think that's a good question because I'm sure we weren't taught that a speed limit of 70 miles an hour means you can go 85. We weren't taught that a yellow light means gun it to make it through the intersection. We weren't taught that if that guy in the left lane is going too slow, zip around him on the right side. Yet, how many of us do those things? I am not the 100% safe driver my instructors tried to teach me to be. If we want to make driving safer and saner we should keep doing what we were taught to do.

Now, I'll get off my driver's training soap box, because you didn't come to hear about that. But I didn't bring it up just to vent my frustrations. I brought it up because the principle of doing what you were taught has broad based application in our lives. A number of years ago, a man named Robert Fulghum wrote a book entitled *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. He listed things like "play fair," "don't hit people," "clean up your own messes" and "take a nap in the afternoon." His thesis was that society would be better if we all did what we were taught when we were five. Just as that principle applies in so many other situations, it applies to our spiritual lives. In fact, it's the central idea of St. Paul's words Timothy which are before us this morning. He told Timothy and us, "**Continue in what you have learned.**"

I.

When he wrote this letter, Paul knew that he was going to die soon. Almost the last words he wrote speak to living as Christians. Living for Christ is a natural part of faith. If you are a believer in Jesus, it will change the way that you live and the choices that you make. It will change the way you think and what you feel about things. Paul tells us, "**Continue in what you have learned. Live for Christ in this sinful world.**"

Paul contrasts believers with "evil men and imposters." Evil people are those who follow the devil instead of Christ. Imposters are people who say they're Christians, but in reality, they trust in themselves. Paul says these people "**go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.**" The farther you get from Jesus, the more sinful your life becomes. But it isn't always obvious. Imposters look like Christians. Even unbelievers at times seem like good people. They are deceiving and being deceived. They fool themselves. They think that being good spouses and making it to their kids' soccer games puts them on God's side. But you know what? Some of the most horrible people in history have been good family men. I read an article a week or two ago about a man who owned a slave prison before the Civil War. He tortured slaves who tried to escape. And he fathered three daughters by a slave woman, whom he raised as free women. He educated them at private

schools. He sent them north so that no one would accuse them of being runaway slaves. The article pointed out that he was a dedicated father even while he brutalized helpless slaves.

Most people are heroes in their own minds. They deceive themselves. And they deceive the rest of us into thinking they're good people. But their sin continues. Paul calls us to live our faith in Christ. To help us do that, God provides models for our faith. Timothy knew Paul's way of life. All of us have known people we admired for the way they lived their faith. I am sure that many of us here today had parents who taught us the word of God and when we think of models of faith, we think of them or of pastors or teachers or Christian friends we've known and looked up to.

But if we really knew those people well, then we know they suffered to live like that. Paul says, **"Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."** People don't like other people to look better than they do. Think of the kids who sit in the back of the classroom and snicker and throw things at the kids in front who pay attention and do their work and stay out of trouble. Just as mockery can be the cost of being a good student, mockery is the cost of living for Christ. Our society is rampant with slander against people who live their faith.

But Paul calls us all to continue in what we learned. To be that Christian who lives his faith no matter what the cost. Are we willing to be that person? I hope so. But it's so easy to make excuses for our bad behavior – "That person had it coming – he thinks he's better than the rest of us." "I'm a good person." "You can't be in church all the time." "That stuff is OK for pastors, but out here in the real world, things are different." Do those excuses sound at all like something that would come out of your heart? If so, then you must admit that you haven't lived up to the call God gives us. You know what? None of us do. If we did, the Bible wouldn't have to keep reminding us to live this way. But again and again, God's Word calls us to live as children of God because it's so hard. It's hard because we are sinners. When we were born, our hearts belonged to the devil. Now, we have faith. Now, we belong to God. But the sinner inside us still longs to return to the devil. His evil desires are ours. Because of him, we still deserve God's punishment in hell.

But we are not going to hell. God defeated the sinner inside us. He sent Jesus to be the one person who lived his whole life as a child of God. The greatest act of Jesus' perfect life was laying down that life on the cross to pay for all that we are guilty of. Have we mocked those who try to live their faith? Jesus paid for that sin. Have we failed to take seriously God's call to change? Jesus suffered hell itself for that sin. Have we struggled and despaired of ever really giving glory to God? Jesus died because we're such big failures. Then Jesus rose. When he rose, God declared that he had wiped away all our sin and failure. God declared that he sees us as if we were Jesus – holy and perfect and totally committed to him. God sees us the way he wants us to be. Now he calls us to live the way he sees us. Continue in a life that gives glory to God.

II.

But how can we do that? I mean, most of us are those guys who drive ten miles over the limit and gun it to make the yellow light. We don't even follow what we were taught in driver's training. How are we ever going to live what we were taught as Christians? Paul tells us, **"Continue in what you have learned. Depend on the Word for strength and guidance."**

Paul told Timothy to continue in God's Word because from infancy he had known the scriptures which make us wise for salvation through Jesus Christ. Those Scriptures are the key. Paul told Timothy, **"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."** God breathed the words right into the minds and hearts of the men who wrote the Bible. Every word is true. Every word is trustworthy. The Bible is the one foundation that will not fail us as we stumble through life in this sinful world. It is the power of God to equip us to live for Christ. That power works first to change our thinking and our feelings. Through that change in our hearts and minds, it changes the way we live.

Is that training easy or fun? Well, do you like being rebuked? Do you enjoy squirming because you've been caught in the light of God's holy law? That's what God called pastors to do to you – to force you to see your guilt. But then comes the teaching and the training in righteousness. The first step of teaching and training in righteousness is forgiveness. Yes, you are sinner. You've made excuses for your sin over and over again but you deserve nothing but death and hell. Nevertheless, Christ died and paid for it all. God has wiped it all away. Knowing that brings a new desire to live for Christ. Because we are still sinners, we need to know

how to live that way. So God's Word trains us. It tells us which actions and ideas are wrong. It points us to what is right. But we turn to what is right only because God has set us free through his Word.

That word is so important that God tells his ministers to be prepared to preach it at all times. When it seems convenient and when it isn't. Why? Because the end is coming. When this world ends, what's going to matter? Not how big your house was. Not how popular you were. Nobody's going to care how much time you gained by beating that red light. The only question that will matter is whether or not you trusted in Christ as your Savior. Every day that you live here, the devil is going to try to talk you out of that faith or beat you out of it. But God gave you pastors and teachers so that you hear it, over and over again, in every situation of your life.

Paul said, **“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”** My friends, that time is now. People today do not want to hear what the Bible says. They do not want to hear about doctrine. Right here, in our congregation, we've had families leave because they don't want to hear what the Bible says. They don't want to hear that they are sinners. They don't want to hear that God tells us to mark and avoid false teachers. They don't want to hear that scouting is contrary to God's Word. Rather than sit down with me or Mr. Wilson or a member of our church council and talk about what the Word of God says, they church shop. They look for a pastor that will tell them what they want to hear.

That is sin, plain and simple. Now, if I do not proclaim God's Word clearly and faithfully, then God expects you to get rid of me. But if I do tell you what that Word says, God expects you to listen to that Word and live by it. Are we willing to do that? Of course we are. We're Christians. The New Man God put in our hearts will always rejoice to live exactly as God tells us to. But the sinner inside us hates what God says. He chafes at the Word which condemns the fun he wants to have. He despises faith in a Savior who had to die on a cross. Every one of us has that Old Man inside us. He makes it hard to listen to pastors who insist on pure doctrine. He thinks we have better things to spend our time on.

What are we going to do about that Old Man in our hearts? We're going to wage war against him. That war begins with knowing his attitude is sin – sin that Jesus died to pay for. Jesus died to free us from that Old Man. You are free today. You are a new creation in Christ. And when you see Jesus face to face, that Old Man will be gone forever.

But if Jesus doesn't come back today, this will be another day of battle against that sinner inside you. So God gave you the gospel to give you strength. Jesus is working in your heart through that message, through the baptism that claimed you, through the communion that we will celebrate in just a moment. And God gave you the ministry. He called men to preach Christ to you, to encourage you to stay on the right path, to rebuke you when you need to hear that your life and your ideas don't agree with God's. God gave you a congregation where the gospel reigns supreme. He calls you to keep coming to this church to hear that good news that Jesus loves you, that Jesus has forgiven you, that Jesus will stand with you and strengthen you through the gospel. He promises to guide your life through his Word.

You know what? You've heard all that before. You heard it in catechism class before you were confirmed. You've heard me say it all before right here in this church. God will keep telling you that same message, because his call to you is to be faithful to that message. He calls you to continue in what you have learned. There is nothing better for your heart or your soul. Amen.