

I'm sure all of you at one time or another had a teacher that you really admired. ...And it probably wasn't just for how fun they made the class or how clearly they taught the material—but rather it was their entire way of life. Perhaps you admired their humility or the way they interacted with their students; maybe you appreciated their sense of humor or their caring attitude and the way you could trust them; maybe you admired the passion they had for the subject or the dedication with which they taught; or maybe what you admired was how everybody else seemed to admire and respect that teacher as well.

Whatever the case, when you have a teacher whom you greatly admire, you also typically gain a great desire to follow in their footsteps and a tremendous appreciation for the things you learned from them. The things they taught you are things that stick with you for life, and don't fade away like so much of the other information crammed into your head during your years of schooling. A teacher that you admire and respect will often inspire you to want to continue to learn more, and to put into practice for yourself all the things that you so gratefully saw demonstrated in them.

A young pastor by the name of Timothy had some very admirable teachers in his own life. Among them were his mother, his grandmother, and the Apostle Paul. And what Timothy both saw in them and learned from them were things that would hold eternal importance for his life and ministry. So as we focus on a portion of Paul's second letter to Timothy this morning, we hear Paul's encouragement to his dear pupil, we think about the important example that Timothy's teachers laid down for him, and we reflect on how still today as 21st Century Christians, it's absolutely of vital importance that we ourselves also take to heart Paul's heartfelt plea: **"Continue in what you've learned!"**

Imagine the thoughts that were probably all going through Paul's mind as he wrote this letter. There he sat in a cold jail cell in the city of Rome. He knew his time left on this earth was short. And because letters took a lot longer to travel back then than they do today, he knew this would no doubt also be his final opportunity to communicate with one of his dearest students that he'd taken under his wing—a student so dear to Paul's heart that he considered him his son. And so in this final letter to Timothy, Paul wanted to share with him some powerful last words of wisdom.

You can relate to that, can't you? I'm sure many of you have at least given some thought to what words of wisdom you'd especially want to share with your sons, your daughters, or your grandkids someday if you come to a realization that your time in this world is drawing to a close. And so, in Paul's case, what greater words of wisdom and encouragement could he possibly give than to remind dear Timothy of the importance of continuing in what he'd learned? What more powerful thought could Paul impress on Timothy's heart than to show him the necessity of remaining faithful to those teachings, since they were teachings that came straight from God himself?

And so, Paul recalls for Timothy some of the very struggles that he himself went through. Not in boastfulness, but in humility and thankfulness to God, Paul asks Timothy to think about just how much Paul's entire way of life reflected the message he proclaimed. He points out his faith, his patience, his love—and he especially highlights the fact that he even was willing to suffer all kinds of persecutions along the way for the message he taught, because he was that convinced that this message was God's honest truth.

Why did Paul feel the need to bring all of this to the front of Timothy's mind? Plain and simple, because Timothy was going to need strength and inspiration to carry on! Paul hadn't taught Timothy everything he'd taught him just for the fun of it! He'd taught him in order that Timothy could continue to teach others and faithfully pass along the good news of the gospel even long after Paul was gone...And Paul knew that, because of rampant persecution, things weren't going to be any easier for Timothy in his ministry than they were for Paul in his. So he warns that **"everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."** But then he simply continues on: **"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."**

...*"Continue in what you've learned and become convinced of."* ...Powerful last words from Paul to his dear pupil. And the reason he urged this so strongly was because the things that Timothy had, in fact, learned were of eternal importance. The message of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus is more important than any other teaching in the world. And if Timothy would continue on in faithfulness to the teachings that the Holy Spirit himself gives through the Scriptures, not only would he personally benefit eternally from this, but so would all whom he'd teach along the way throughout the course of his ministry.

Therefore, Paul gives one more urgent plea. After recalling to Timothy's mind the true joy, the true peace, the true blessedness that God imparts through the message of his holy Scriptures, he returns again to the thought of just how

much the devil will try to oppose this message. Having recalled earlier his own challenges in preaching the gospel, Paul wraps up his thoughts in this section by warning Timothy that the challenge posed by false teachers would be a very real one. At the hands of the devil, there'd be a great many people who one day would call themselves Christians, yet in subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle ways, would pervert the truth. They'd discredit the Holy Spirit's inspiration of God's word, they'd teach people not what *God* says, but what these people—according to their sinful nature—want to hear, and finally, they'd lead many people not *to* the truth, but *away from* the truth, just as the devil so eagerly desires.

Yet Paul remains confident—not because Timothy in and of himself was such a strong and noble person; but because Paul was confident that the Holy Spirit, whose truth Timothy was convinced of, would keep him faithful to that truth. And so, even though such warnings could certainly be intimidating, he finally just says very matter-of-factly: **“Keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.”** Paul could be confident that this would be the case as Timothy, with God's help and following in the footsteps of his teacher, continued in what he'd learned.

Paul's words—which were given to him by the Holy Spirit—certainly are every bit just as important today as they were back then! We see their fulfillment all around us, don't we? As we hear his words about the persecution that faithful believers would suffer, as we hear him forewarn about the intolerance of Scriptural teachings that would become more and more self-evident along the way, his words of urging to continue in what you've learned and become convinced of are as important as ever!

For one, we *do* see persecutions growing, don't we? I don't really have to say anything more than the word “Isis,” and you immediately understand what I'm talking about. Or if I point out how even our own government and our own culture are trying to silence the teachings of Christianity within our midst, again, it's not hard to see. But perhaps the even bigger threat to God's church on earth is not so much the persecution, but rather the very type of false teaching that Paul cautions Timothy about. You see, when Christians suffer physical persecution, yeah, it's scary, but it often ultimately wakes us Christians up and leads us to an even stronger clinging to the gospel than in times of peace. But when the devil uses the more subtle tactic of slipping in false teachings alongside the truth, this can really do serious damage, as it essentially acts like a cancer that slowly and quietly destroys the message of salvation.

And so it's no surprise that we see an ever-increasing number of churches in America changing and twisting long-held biblical truths into teachings that the sinful nature wants to hear. We hear them make claims that many of the stories in the Bible—like the creation account, for example—are just myths that are meant to teach a lesson. We hear them say that morality is something that can shift with cultural views, and that we need not be so “closed-minded” as biblical writers like the Apostle Paul were. There are teachers in the realm of the visible Christian church nowadays who teach that a loving God would never send anyone to hell, and that all religions (whether Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc.) are all just different paths to the same God. ...And there's a whole host of other similarly deceptive teachings out there that sound good to fallen human reason—but the reality is that such “Christian” teachers are only leading people further away from the truth, and causing destruction to the very gospel from within the church whose mission it is to proclaim it.

But in spite of all that, you know the truth! By God's grace, you've all had the opportunity to learn God's word from teachers who revere it and understand it to be the Holy Spirit-inspired truth. You've been brought to an understanding that our duty is definitely not to make Scripture conform to human reason, but rather to make human reason conform to Scripture. And therefore, along with this, you also have the joy of being confident in the message of salvation that you learn in Scripture—the eternally comforting truth that God, in love, sent his Son Jesus Christ to pay for all your sins; and that through faith in him you have eternal life in heaven awaiting you!

So ***continue in what you've learned!*** There will be many both from within and from without the visible Christian church who'll oppose the saving message of the gospel. But you, keep your head. You know the trustworthiness of those from whom you've learned it—and you have God's powerful promise that as you continue to keep yourself rooted in his holy Scriptures, the Holy Spirit will preserve and nurture your faith; and the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ will keep you wise for salvation until the day he takes you to be with him. Amen.