

Here comes trouble: II

Paul's Legacy vs. False Teachers

But you have followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, and endurance, ¹¹ along with the persecutions and sufferings that came to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured—and yet the Lord rescued me from them all. ¹² In fact, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. ¹³ Evil people and impostors will become worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed. You know those who taught you, ¹⁵ and you know that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:10-18

Jesus was crucified & killed.

- “If they persecute me, they will also persecute you.” John 15:20

In Lystra, Timothy's hometown, Paul was stoned, dragged outside the city & left for dead.

- Beaten with whips 5 times. Imprisoned. Shipwrecked on a prisoner ship. Been without food. Been cold & naked. (2 Corinthians 11:23-29)
 - Through all of that he wasn't bitter at God. He still had the confidence to say, “*the Lord rescued me from them all.*” (v. 11)
- What's his point here?
 - To contrast the truth of his teachings & his life against that of the pleasure-seeking false teachers!
 - For them, it's all about self. How can they get more money, more influence, more “power.”

These “false teachers” weren’t necessarily claiming to be Christians. In Timothy’s time, as it is today, Society & government were pressuring them to abandon Christian morals. To be more inclusive.

- All they had to say was Jesus is Lord AND Caesar is Lord.
 - Yet they would cling to the exclusivity of Christ.
- Temple Prostitutes were wanting to draw men & women alike away from their families under the guise of “It’s all about self.” A little fun never hurt anyone after all! (SARCASM)
 - 19 people were arrested in a prostitution sting in Wichita last week.
 - 6 out of 10 men have looked at pornography in the past month
 - Women too, are hooked on Porn.
 - They devalue marriage & sexuality.
 - Sex is a wonderful thing but it was meant to be expressed between one man & one woman within marriage.
 - False teachers of Paul’s time, and of our own, say otherwise that marriage is more open & expressive than such a limited view.
- Ultimately the false teachers were going against scripture & it’s teachings. They were challenging its validity & whenever a true teacher shared scripture, and lived it out, then persecution came upon them.

¹² In fact, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. ¹³ Evil people and impostors will become worse, deceiving and being deceived. V. 12-13

We talked last week about how Paul was telling us to... “Be Prepared for Trouble.”

- Chapter 3 verses 1-13 were a warning of things to come.
- V. 14-17 tell us how to prepare.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed. You know those who taught you, ¹⁵ and you know that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. V. 14-17

How do we prepare for trouble?

Get to know God's Word.

We see that Paul's point to Timothy, and to us, is stressing the importance of using God's word as both the standard by which false teachings & false living is discovered.

God's Word...

1) Inspired by God (v. 16)

- a. "The Bible is not a collection of stories, fables, myths, or merely human ideas about God. It is not a human book. Through the Holy Spirit, God revealed his person and plan to certain believers, who wrote down his message for his people." (Life Application)

2) Profitable for...

- a. Teaching
- b. Rebuking
- c. Correcting

3) Training in Righteousness.

- **Know:** to have a practical understanding of: *knows how to write* (Webster)

But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. James 1:22

- "It is important to listen to what God's Word says, but it is much more important to obey it, to *do* what it says. We can measure the effectiveness of our Bible study time by the effect it has on our behavior and attitudes. Do you put into action what you have studied?" (Life Application)

4) Teaches us about Salvation through Christ (v.15)

- a. Salvation is found only through Him.
- b.

“In stark contrast to the contemporary decline in morals, empty show of religion and spread of false teaching Timothy is called to be different, and if necessary to stand alone.” (Stott)

“‘But as for you,’ Paul says to us as he did to Timothy, ‘stand firm. Never mind if the pressure to conform is very strong. Never mind if you are young, inexperienced, timid and weak. Never mind if you find yourself alone in your witness. You have followed my teaching so far. Now continue in what you have come to believe. You know the biblical credentials of your faith. Scripture is God-breathed and profitable. Even in the midst of these grievous times in which evil men and impostors go on from bad to worse, it can make you complete and it can equip you for your work. Let the word of God make you a man of God! Remain loyal to it and it will lead you on into Christian maturity.’” (Stott)

Follow Those Who Are True (2 Tim. 3:10–12)

Paul turned from the false leaders to remind Timothy that he (Paul) had been a faithful servant of God. It is important in these difficult days that we follow the right spiritual leaders. What are their characteristics?

Their lives are open for all to see (v. 10a). Paul had nothing to hide. Like his Master, he could say, “In secret have I said nothing” (John 18:20). “My manner of life from my youth ... know all the Jews,” Paul had told Agrippa (Acts 26:4). Timothy had lived and labored with Paul and knew the man well. Paul had not hidden behind extravagant claims or religious propaganda.

They teach true doctrine (v. 10b). “My doctrine” in Paul’s case meant the true faith, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. No matter how appealing a preacher may be, if he does not preach the truth of God’s Word, he does not deserve our support. On radio and TV today, we have a great deal of “pseudo-Christianity” which is a mixture of psychology, success motivation, and personality cults, with a little bit of Bible thrown in to make it look religious. Beware!

They practice what they preach (v. 10c). Paul’s “manner of life” backed up his messages. He did not preach sacrifice and live in luxury. He gave to others far more than he received from them. He stood up for the truth even when it meant losing friends and, in the end, losing his life. Paul was a servant, not a celebrity.

Their purpose is to glorify God (v. 10d). There was never a question about Paul’s “purpose” in ministry: He wanted to do God’s will and finish the work God gave him to do (Acts 20:24; Phil. 1:21). The Apostle Paul was a man of “faith” who trusted God to meet his needs. He was a man of “long-suffering” who bore up under people’s attacks. He was a man of love (“charity”) who willingly gave himself to serve others.

The word *patience* at the end of 2 Timothy 3:10 means “endurance, the ability to stick with it when the going gets tough.”

They are willing to suffer (vv. 11–12). Paul did not ask others to suffer for him; *he suffered for others*. The fact that he was persecuted from city to city was proof that he was living a godly life. Some people today have the idea that godliness means *escaping* persecution, when just the opposite is true.

I wonder how Paul would match up with today’s concept of a Christian leader. He would probably fail miserably. If he applied for service with a modern mission board, would he be accepted? He had a prison record; he had a physical affliction; he stirred up problems in just about every place he visited. He was poor, and he did not cater to the rich. Yet God used him, and we are being blessed today because Paul was faithful.

Continue in God’s Word (2 Tim. 3:13–17)

The only way to defeat Satan’s lies is with God’s truth. “Thus saith the Lord!” is the final answer to every question. Evil men and deceivers are going to get worse and worse. They will deceive more and more. Why? Because they are being deceived by Satan! In these last days, there will be more deception and imitation; and the only way a believer will be able to tell the true from the false is by knowing the Word of God.

Timothy had been taught the Word of God from the time he was a child. Some people are prone to say, “Well, I needed the Bible when I was younger; but I can do without it now that I’m older.” How wrong they are! Adults need the guidance of the Word far more than children do because adults face more temptations and make more decisions. Timothy’s grandmother and mother had faithfully taught him the Old Testament Scriptures. (The word *whom* in 2 Tim. 3:14 is plural, referring to these women; see 2 Tim. 1:5.) Timothy was to continue in what he had been taught. We never outgrow the Word of God.

This is a good place to admonish Christian parents to teach their children the Bible. In our home, my wife and I used Kenneth Taylor’s *Bible Stories with Pictures for Little Eyes*; in fact, we wore out two copies! What a joy it was to see our older children who had learned to read share the stories with the younger ones and help them answer the questions. Little by little, the children graduated to older Bible storybooks and then to Bibles of their own. We were fortunate that our Sunday School included a Bible memory program. As soon as your child is born, surround him with the Word of God and prayer. You will not have this opportunity after he grows up.

In this paragraph, Paul made some important statements about the Scriptures:

They are the Holy Scriptures (v. 15a). “The sacred letters” is a literal translation. The suggestion is that young Timothy learned his Hebrew alphabet by spelling his way through the Old Testament Scriptures. The word for *holy* means “consecrated for sacred use.” The Bible is different from every other book—even books about the Bible—because it has been set apart by God for special sacred uses. We must treat the Bible as the special book it is.

The way we treat the Bible shows others how much or how little we respect it. While I don’t want to become a crank in this matter, I must confess that I hate to see a Bible on the floor. When we are carrying a Bible and other books, the Bible should be on the top. There is a difference between properly marking a Bible as we study and defacing it by careless marking. I have seen people put a cup of coffee on a Bible! Paul gives us the right attitude toward the Word of God (1 Thes. 2:13).

The Scriptures lead us to salvation (v. 15b). We are not saved by believing the Bible (see John 5:39), but by trusting the Christ who is revealed in the Bible. Satan knows the Bible but he is not saved. Timothy was raised on the Holy Scriptures in a godly home. Yet it was not until Paul led him to Christ that he was saved.

What is the relationship of the Bible to salvation? To begin with, the Bible reveals our need for salvation. It is a mirror that shows us how filthy we are in God’s sight. The Bible explains that every lost sinner is condemned *now* (John 3:18–21) and needs a Saviour *now*. It also makes it clear that a lost sinner cannot save himself.

But the Bible also reveals God’s wonderful plan of salvation: Christ died for our sins! If we trust Him, He will save us (John 3:16–18). The Bible also helps give us the assurance of our salvation (see 1 John 5:9–13). Then the Bible becomes our spiritual food to nourish us that we might grow in grace and serve Christ. It is our sword for fighting Satan and overcoming temptation.

The Scriptures are true and dependable (v. 16a). “All Scripture is God-breathed” (NIV). The doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture is vitally important, and a doctrine that Satan has attacked from the beginning (“Yea, hath God said?” [Gen. 3:1]). **It is inconceivable that God would give His people a book they could not trust.** He is the God of truth (Deut. 32:4); Jesus is “the truth” (John

14:6); and the “Spirit is truth” (1 John 5:6). Jesus said of the Scriptures, “Thy Word is truth” (John 17:17).

The Holy Spirit of God used men of God to write the Word of God (2 Peter 1:20–21). The Spirit did not erase the natural characteristics of the writers. In fact, God in His providence prepared the writers for the task of writing the Scriptures. Each writer has his own distinctive style and vocabulary. Each book of the Bible grew out of a special set of circumstances. In His preparation of men, in His guiding of history, and in His working through the Spirit, God brought about the miracle of the Scriptures.

We must not think of “inspiration” the way the world thinks when it says, “Shakespeare was certainly an inspired writer.” What we mean by biblical *inspiration* is the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit on the Bible’s writers, which guaranteed that what they wrote was accurate and trustworthy. *Revelation* means the communicating of truth to man by God; *inspiration* has to do with the *recording* of this communication in a way that is dependable.

Whatever the Bible says about itself, man, God, life, death, history, science, and every other subject is true. This does not mean that every statement in the Bible is true, because the Bible records the lies of men and of Satan. *But the record is true.*

The Scriptures are profitable (v. 16b). They are profitable for *doctrine* (what is right), for *reproof* (what is not right), for *correction* (how to get right), and for *instruction in righteousness* (how to stay right). A Christian who studies the Bible and applies what he learns will grow in holiness and avoid many pitfalls in this world.

The Scriptures equip us for service (v. 17). Earlier Paul had called Timothy a “man of God” (1 Tim. 6:11); but here Paul states that *any* Christian can become a person “of God.” How? By studying the Word of God, obeying it, and letting it control his life. It is worth noting that all of the “men of God” named in Scripture—including Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, David, and Timothy—were men who were devoted to God’s Word.

Two words in this verse are especially important: “perfect” and “furnished.” The word translated “perfect” means “complete, in fit shape, in fit condition.” It does not begin to suggest sinless perfection. Rather, it implies being fitted for use.

“Furnished” has a similar meaning: “equipped for service.” In other words, the Word of God furnishes and equips a believer so that he can live a life that pleases God and do the work God wants him to do. **The better we know the Word, the better we are able to live and work for God.**

The purpose of Bible study is *not* just to understand doctrines or to be able to defend the faith, as important as these things are. The ultimate purpose is the equipping of the believers who read it. It is the Word of God that equips God’s people to do the work of God.

The times are not going to get better, but we Christians can become better people, even in bad times. We must separate ourselves from that which is false, devote ourselves to that which is true, and continue in our study of the Word of God. Then God can equip us for ministry in these difficult days, and we will have the joy of seeing others come to a knowledge of the truth.¹

Standing Firm in the Faith (verses 10–15)

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 251–253). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

In this paragraph Paul twice addresses Timothy with the same two little Greek monosyllables *su de*. They come at the beginning of verses 10 and 14 (like the *su oun* of 2:1) and should be translated 'But as for you ...'. In stark contrast to the contemporary decline in morals, empty show of religion and spread of false teaching Timothy is called to be different, and if necessary to stand alone.

Every Christian is called to be different from the world. 'Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould' (Rom. 12:2, JBP). Certainly the pressures upon us to conform are colossal, not only from the direct challenge to traditional beliefs and morals, but also—and more—from the insidious, pervasive atmosphere of secularism which even seeps into the church. Many give in, often without realizing what they are doing. But again and again the word of God addresses us, calling us not to be moved. We are not to be like a 'reed shaken with the wind', feebly bowing down before it from whatever direction it may blow. Rather, like a rock in a mountain torrent, we are to stand firm.

One might paraphrase the apostle's double exhortation to Timothy in verses 10 to 14 like this: 'But as for you, in spite of all the current false teaching, what you have been closely following is *my* doctrine and *my* way of life, together with *my* purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions and sufferings ... Wicked men and charlatans, deceiving others and themselves deceived, will still make their strange progress from bad to worse. But as for you, you are not to progress in any direction, least of all away from or beyond my teaching (for that would be declension, not advance). On the contrary, you are to stand firm, to continue and abide in what you learned and have believed, because you know from whom you learned it ...'

Paul first reminds Timothy what he has been doing thus far: 'you have observed' or followed 'my teaching' (10). Then he exhorts him to continue in the same path: 'continue in what you have learned' (14). So verses 10 to 13 describe Timothy's *past* loyalty to the apostle, and verses 14 to 17 urge him to remain loyal in the *future*. The two main verbs sum up the gist of the paragraph: 'you have *followed* me faithfully up till now (10); so then *continue* to do so (14)'.

a. The past (verses 10–13)

Timothy's position is explained in terms of a certain 'following' of Paul. The verb *parakolouthēō* can be used literally, of following a person as he goes somewhere and of walking in his footsteps. But it is not so used in the New Testament. Its figurative use can refer either to an intellectual following, much as we say to a person who is explaining something to us 'I follow you', or to a real commitment of mind and life as when we say of somebody 'he's a follower of So-and-so'. AG define these two meanings as to 'follow with the mind, understand, make one's own' and to 'follow faithfully, follow as a rule'. Luke uses the verb more or less in the former sense, when he tells Theophilus of his painstaking historical investigations. He has 'followed all things closely for some time past', he writes (Lk. 1:3). But Paul seems to use the verb in the other and more

committed sense in his letters to Timothy. In the first letter he has urged Timothy to nourish himself on 'the good doctrine which you have followed', that is, embraced. So surely the verb has the same meaning here in the second letter. Paul is reminding Timothy not simply that he has 'fully known' (AV) or 'observed' (RSV) his doctrine and conduct, as if he were merely an impartial student or a detached observer, but that he has become a dedicated disciple of the apostle's. No doubt he had begun by taking pains to grasp the meaning of Paul's instruction. But then he went further. He made it his own, believed it, absorbed it, lived by it. Similarly, he doubtless began by watching the apostle's manner of life, but then he went on to imitate it. Because Paul knew himself as an apostle to be following Christ, he did not hesitate to invite others to follow himself: 'Be imitators of me,' he wrote, 'as I am of Christ' (1 Cor. 11:1; cf. 1 Thes. 1:6). He even made himself the standard by which truth could be distinguished from falsehood: 'Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us' (Phil. 3:17). Thus, in both belief and practice, in 'teaching' and 'conduct' (10), Timothy became and remained Paul's faithful follower. He had 'followed step by step' (NEB).

The contrast with the first paragraph of this chapter is obvious. The men described there were following their own inclinations (they were lovers of self, money and pleasure), and their pathetic converts had been carried away by their own impulses. Timothy, on the other hand, has followed an altogether different standard, namely the teaching and the example of Christ's apostle Paul. So Paul goes on to list the characteristics of his life, in contrast to that of the self-lovers whom he has characterized in verses 2–5. The emphatic words are the personal pronouns and possessive adjectives. They bring out the contrast clearly: 'For men will be lovers of self ... *They* will be and do this and that. But as for *you*, Timothy, *you* (as distinct from *them*) have followed *me*, *my* teaching, *my* conduct, *etc.*'

Why, however, does Paul give us in verses 10 and 11 this catalogue of his virtues and sufferings? Is it not more than a little immodest, even conceited, that the apostle should put himself forward like this? Perhaps it is understandable that he should mention his 'teaching', but why go on to blow his own trumpet about his faith and love, his purpose and conduct, his sufferings and his endurance? Is it not rather unseemly that he should boast like this?

No, Paul is not boasting. He has reasons quite other than exhibitionism for drawing attention to himself. He mentions his teaching first, and then goes on to supply two objective evidences of the genuineness of his teaching, namely the life he lived and the sufferings he endured. Indeed, these are good (though not infallible) general tests of a person's sincerity, and even of the truth or falsehood of his system. Is he so convinced of his position that he both practises what he preaches and is prepared to suffer for it? Have his beliefs made him a better man, even in the face of opposition? Paul could answer both questions affirmatively. The false teachers lived lives of self-indulgence, and it would be quite out of character to expect them to be willing to suffer for their views; they were altogether too soft and easygoing for that. The apostle Paul, however, lived a consistent life of righteousness, self-control, faith and love, and remained steadfast to his principles through many and grievous persecutions.

Look at his behaviour first. Timothy had observed and tried to imitate Paul's 'conduct' (*agōgē*, his whole demeanour and way of life), his 'aim in life' (the spiritual ambitions which motivated him and made life meaningful for him), his 'faith' (which perhaps here includes his fidelity), his 'patience' (*makrothymia*, tolerance or long-suffering towards aggravating people), his 'love' (towards both God and man, as opposed to the false teachers' love for self, money and pleasure)

and his 'steadfastness' (*hypomonē*, the patient endurance of trying circumstances, in distinction to *makrothymia*, the patient endurance of trying people). Indeed, since *hypomonē* ('steadfastness') is regularly in the New Testament the child of our Christian 'hope', our expectation of the Lord's return and the glory to follow, we may detect within this list yet another example of Paul's favourite triad of graces 'faith, hope and love.'

The reference to 'steadfastness' or 'endurance' naturally leads on to the 'persecutions' and the 'sufferings' which Paul had had to endure. In particular, he mentions the three Galatian cities Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, because Timothy was a citizen of Lystra and had possibly himself witnessed the occasion when the apostle had been stoned by a hostile mob, dragged out of the city and left in the gutter for dead, though from this and all other persecutions so far the Lord had rescued him. Perhaps Paul's courage under persecution had even played a part in Timothy's conversion, much as Stephen's bravery in martyrdom had done in Paul's. At all events, Timothy had 'followed' Paul's persecutions, first watching them, and then discovering that he must himself share in them, for he could not be committed to Paul's teaching and conduct without becoming involved in his sufferings also.

In verse 12 Paul makes it clear that his experience was not unique. He sought to live 'a godly life in Christ Jesus', loving and serving God rather than himself, and he suffered for it. Timothy had found the same thing. For all Christian people who 'in Christ Jesus' (*i.e.* through union with him) 'desire to live a godly life ... will be persecuted', and indeed are bound to suffer persecution. **The godly arouse the antagonism of the worldly.** It has always been so. It was so for Christ, and he said it would be for us: 'If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, "A servant is not greater than his master." If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you' (Jn. 15:18–20; *cf.* 16:33). It is important to notice the situation in which Christ here told his followers to expect persecution. He envisaged that they would be both in the world (living among godless people) and at the same time 'not of the world' (living a godly life in Christ). Those who are in Christ but not in the world are not persecuted, because they do not come into contact and therefore into collision with their potential persecutors. Those who are in the world but not in Christ are also not persecuted, because the world sees nothing in them to persecute. The former escape persecution by withdrawal from the world, the latter by assimilation to it. **It is only for those who are both in the world and in Christ simultaneously that persecution becomes inevitable.** As Calvin comments, 'it is in vain to try to detach Christ from his cross, and it is only natural that the world should hate Christ even in his members'.²

This inevitability of persecution is further explained in verse 13 by the continued activities of false teachers. Paul is quite outspoken about them. He dubs them 'evil men' and 'impostors'. The latter word (*goēs*) means a 'sorcerer, juggler' and so in early Christian literature a 'swindler, cheat' (AG). The apostle does not credit them with sincerity; they are 'charlatans' (NEB). Such men 'will go on from bad to worse'. The verb for 'go on' (*prokoptō*) properly means to 'go forward, progress', but here Paul uses it ironically, since the only advance they make is backwards, not forwards, 'from bad to worse'. He appears to be referring not to their success as teachers, for he has said that 'they will not get very far' (9), but to their own personal deterioration, both intellectual and moral. They are 'deceivers and deceived'. Alfred Plummer explains it well: 'they

begin by being seducers and end in being dupes, and the dupes (very often) of their own deceptions; for deceit commonly leads to self-deceit'.

b. The future (verses 14, 15)

So far in this paragraph Paul has been describing himself, but doing so in relation to Timothy who has taken him as his guide. Timothy is seen to stand out in bold relief against the background of the prevalent evildoers and false teachers. For he has carefully 'followed' Paul and modelled himself on Paul's teaching. Moreover, he has been right to do so, for Paul's teaching has been amply confirmed by his godly life and by his many persecutions bravely borne. Now for the second time Paul begins a sentence 'But as for you' (*su de*), distinguishing Timothy from the 'evil men and impostors' he has just described. Previously he has contrasted their pursuit of their own inclinations with Timothy's faithful following of apostolic doctrine and example. Now he draws another contrast: they 'go on' (though we have seen what a peculiar form their progress assumed), whereas Timothy is to 'continue' or abide in what he has learned and believed.

This kind of summons is not infrequently heard in the pages of the New Testament. It is specially relevant whenever innovators arise in the church, 'radicals' who claim to be progressive and who repudiate everything which savours of the traditional. It has perhaps never been more needed than today when men boast of inventing a 'new Christianity' with a 'new theology' and a 'new morality', all of which betoken a 'new reformation'. To be sure, the church of every generation must seek to translate the faith into the contemporary idiom, to relate the unchanging word to the changing world. But a translation is a rendering of the same message into another language; it is not a fresh composition. Yet this is what some modern radicals are doing, setting forth concepts of God and of Christ which Jesus and his apostles would not have recognized as their own. In such a situation we may perhaps be forgiven if, borrowing the Lord's own words, we say to them: 'no one after drinking old wine desires new; for he says, "the old is better"' (Lk. 5:39, RSV mg.). The apostles themselves constantly warned their readers of newfangled ideas and called them back to the original apostolic message. Thus John declares that 'anyone who goes ahead and does not *abide* in the doctrine of Christ does not have God' and exhorts his flock 'let what you heard from the beginning *abide* in you', for then they would '*abide* in the Son and in the Father' (2 Jn. 9; 1 Jn. 2:24). Similarly here Paul enjoins Timothy to *abide* in what he has learned. In each of these verses the Greek verb is the same. Timothy had learned things and now firmly believed them. All right. Now he must *continue* in these things with steadfastness and not allow anyone to shift him from his ground.

The apostle now adds two reasons. His clear command to Timothy to abide, to cultivate stability in the truths he has learned, rests on two simple and plain arguments which he elaborates in verses 14b and 15. Timothy must continue in *what* he has learned, because he knows from *whom* he has learned it. The teaching was guaranteed by the teacher. And who was this? The Greek manuscripts have two readings, one making 'whom' plural and the other singular. The better attested is the plural (*para tinōn*), in which case the teachers referred to will include his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (who had indeed taught him from his infancy; see 1:5; 3:15) as well as the apostle Paul. Commentators who weigh the manuscript evidence go no further than to say that this reading is 'perhaps to be preferred' or is 'probably correct'.² They agree that the alternative (the singular *para tinos*) is also well attested, however, and this would

refer to the apostle Paul alone. Although the external authority for this reading is slightly less strong, the internal evidence seems to me to be more strongly in its favour. That is to say, in the immediate context Paul has been placing emphasis on the fact that Timothy has closely followed his teaching (10). That Paul's apostolic instruction was Timothy's model is stressed by the emphatic 'my' and 'me' of verses 10 and 11.

The wider context of the whole letter points the same way. In the first two chapters, the apostle has begged Timothy both to 'follow the pattern of the sound words *which you have heard from me*' (1:13) and then to entrust to others '*what you have heard from me*' (2:2). It seems probable, therefore, that the phrase 'knowing from whom you learned it' in 3:14 also refers to what Timothy has heard from Paul. Besides, the apostle is apparently giving *two* reasons for Timothy's continued loyalty; it is likely, therefore, that these will be distinct reasons and not both refer to his childhood education in the Scriptures.

In this case, the first ground of Timothy's confidence, and the first reason why he should continue in what he has learned is that he has learned it from Paul. And he knows this Paul who has taught him. He has not only led him to Christ (1:2) and laid hands on him at his ordination (1:6), but he is also 'an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God' (1:1), to whom Christ had entrusted the deposit of the gospel (1:11, 12), who has likened himself to Moses in his teaching of the truth (3:8), whose doctrine and example Timothy has loyally followed thus far, and who has confirmed his teaching by his consistent life and his fortitude in persecution. Timothy was confident in Paul and his teaching authority, and we can share his confidence. Paul's gospel is still authenticated to us by his apostolic authority.

Timothy has not only learned Paul's gospel and known Paul's authority. 'From childhood' he had been instructed in the Old Testament Scriptures presumably by his mother and grandmother, and he was therefore extremely familiar with them. He believed them to be divinely inspired, as Paul is about to say. So the second reason why he must abide in what he has learned from Paul is its harmony with these very Scriptures. This was Paul's consistent claim. On trial before King Agrippa he had affirmed that he was teaching 'nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass; that the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles' (Acts 26:22, 23). Similarly, at the beginning of his letter to the Romans he had described God's gospel to which he was set apart as what God had 'promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures' (Rom. 1:2; cf. 3:21).

So then, the two reasons why Timothy should remain loyal to what he has come firmly to believe are that he has learned it both from Old Testament Scripture and from the apostle Paul. The same two grounds apply today. The gospel we believe is the biblical gospel, the gospel of the Old Testament and of the New Testament, vouched for by both the prophets of God and the apostles of Christ. And we must resolve ourselves to heed the exhortation which Paul addressed to Timothy and to abide in what we have learned because of this double authentication.

4. The Origin and Purpose of Scripture (verses 15b–17)

Two fundamental truths about Scripture are asserted here. The first concerns its origin (where it comes from) and the second its purpose (what it is intended for).

First, 'All scripture is inspired by God'; it is God-breathed. Some scholars, as in NEB, have translated the opening words of verse 16: 'every inspired Scripture has its use'. Such a rendering would place a double limitation on Scripture. It would suggest that not all Scripture is inspired, and that therefore not all Scripture is profitable, but only those parts which are inspired. Since the Greek sentence has no main verb, it is certainly legitimate, grammatically speaking, to supply the verb 'is' after, rather than before, the adjective 'God-inspired' and so translate 'every God-inspired Scripture is profitable'. The argument against this construction, however, is that it does not do justice to the little word 'and' (*kai*) which comes between the two adjectives 'God-inspired' and 'profitable'. This 'and' suggests that Paul is asserting two truths about Scripture, namely that it is both inspired *and* profitable, not merely one. For this reason we should render the sentence: 'all Scripture is God-inspired and profitable'.

What does he mean by 'all Scripture'? It seems to me not at all impossible that by this comprehensive expression he is including the two sources of Timothy's knowledge just mentioned, namely 'what you have learned' (sc. from me) and 'the sacred writings'. It is true that nowhere does the apostle explicitly call his Epistles 'Scripture'. Nevertheless, on a number of occasions he gets very near it, and he certainly directs that his letters be read publicly in the Christian assemblies, no doubt alongside Old Testament readings (e.g. Col. 4:16; 1 Thes. 5:27). Several times he claims to be speaking in the name and with the authority of Christ (e.g. 2 Cor. 2:17; 13:3; Gal. 4:14), and calls his message 'the word of God' (e.g. 1 Thes. 2:13). Once he says that, in communicating to others what God has revealed to him, he uses 'words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit' (1 Cor. 2:13). This is a claim to inspiration, indeed to verbal inspiration, which is the distinctive characteristic of 'Scripture'. Peter clearly regarded Paul's letters as Scripture, for in referring to them he calls the Old Testament 'the other scriptures' (2 Pet. 3:16). In addition, it seems evident that Paul envisaged the possibility of a Christian supplement to the Old Testament because he could combine a quotation from Deuteronomy (25:4) with a saying of Jesus recorded by Luke (10:7) and call both alike 'Scripture' (1 Tim. 5:18).

His definition of Scripture, of 'all scripture', is that it is 'inspired by God'. The single Greek word *theopneustos* would be literally translated 'God-breathed' and indicates not that Scripture itself or its human authors were breathed into by God, but that Scripture was breathed or breathed out by God. 'Inspiration' is doubtless a convenient term to use, but 'spiration' or even 'expiration' would convey the meaning of the Greek adjective more accurately. Scripture is not to be thought of as already in existence when (subsequently) God breathed into it, but as itself brought into existence by the breath or Spirit of God. There is no 'theory' or explanation of inspiration here, for no reference is made to the human authors, who (Peter says) 'moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God' (2 Pet. 1:21). Nevertheless, it is clear from many passages that inspiration, however the process operated, did not destroy the individuality or the active cooperation of the human writers. All that is stated here is the fact of inspiration, that all Scripture is God-breathed. It originated in God's mind and was communicated from God's mouth by God's breath or Spirit. It is therefore rightly termed 'the Word of God', for God spoke it. Indeed, as the prophets used to say, 'the mouth of the Lord has spoken it'.

Secondly, Paul explains the purpose of Scripture: it is 'profitable'. And this is precisely because it is inspired by God. Only its divine origin secures and explains its human profit. In order to show

what this is, Paul uses two expressions. The first is in verse 15: 'The sacred writings', he says, 'are able to instruct you for salvation.' The Bible is essentially a handbook of salvation. Its over-arching purpose is to teach not facts of science (*e.g.* the nature of moon rock) which men can discover by their own empirical investigation, but facts of salvation, which no space exploration can discover but only God can reveal. The whole Bible unfolds the divine scheme of salvation—man's creation in God's image, his fall through disobedience into sin and under judgment, God's continuing love for him in spite of his rebellion, God's eternal plan to save him through his covenant of grace with a chosen people, culminating in Christ; the coming of Christ as the Saviour, who died to bear man's sin, was raised from death, was exalted to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit; and man's rescue first from guilt and alienation, then from bondage, and finally from mortality in his progressive experience of the liberty of God's children. None of this would be known apart from the biblical revelation. 'Scripture contains the perfect rule of a good and happy life.'

More particularly, the Bible instructs for salvation 'through faith in Christ Jesus'. So, since the Bible is a book of salvation, and since salvation is through Christ, the Bible focuses its attention upon Christ. The Old Testament foretells and foreshadows him in many and various ways; the Gospels tell the story of his birth and life, his words and works, his death and resurrection; the Acts describe what he continued to do and teach through his chosen apostles, especially in spreading the gospel and establishing the church from Jerusalem to Rome; the Epistles display the full glory of his person and work, and apply it to the life of the Christian and the church; while the Revelation depicts Christ sharing the throne of God now and coming soon to consummate his salvation and judgment. This comprehensive portraiture of Jesus Christ is intended to elicit our 'faith' in him, in order that by faith we may be saved.

Paul now goes on to show that the profit of Scripture relates to both creed and conduct (16b, 17). The false teachers divorced them; we must marry them. The NEB expresses the matter clearly. As for our creed, Scripture is profitable 'for teaching the truth and refuting error'. As for our conduct, it is profitable 'for reformation of manners and discipline in right living'. In each pair the negative and positive counterparts are combined. Do we hope, either in our own lives or in our teaching ministry, to overcome error and grow in truth, to overcome evil and grow in holiness? Then it is to Scripture that we must primarily turn, for Scripture is 'profitable' for these things.

Indeed, Scripture is the chief means which God employs to bring 'the man of God' to maturity. Who is intended by this expression is not explained. It may be a general term for every Christian, since the words themselves mean no more than 'the man who belongs to God' (NEB). On the other hand, it was an Old Testament title of respect applied to some of God's spokesmen like Moses (Dt. 33:1), David (2 Ch. 8:14) and Elijah (1 Ki. 17:18), and Paul specifically addressed Timothy by this phrase in his first letter (6:11). It may therefore refer here to men called to positions of responsibility in the church, and especially to ministers whose task it is, under the authority of Scripture, to teach and refute, to reform and discipline. At all events, it is only by a diligent study of Scripture that the man of God may become 'complete, equipped for every good work'.

Looking back over this chapter as a whole, we can appreciate the relevance of its message to our pluralist and permissive society. The 'times of stress' in which we seem to be living are very distressing. Sometimes one wonders if the world and the church have gone mad, so strange are their views, and so lax their standards. Some Christians are swept from their moorings by the

floodtide of sin and error. Others go into hiding, as offering the best hope of survival, the only alternative to surrender. But neither of these is the Christian way. 'But as for you,' Paul says to us as he did to Timothy, 'stand firm.' Never mind if the pressure to conform is very strong. Never mind if you are young, inexperienced, timid and weak. Never mind if you find yourself alone in your witness. You have followed my teaching so far. Now continue in what you have come to believe. You know the biblical credentials of your faith. Scripture is God-breathed and profitable. Even in the midst of these grievous times in which evil men and impostors go on from bad to worse, it can make you complete and it can equip you for your work. Let the word of God make you a man of God! Remain loyal to it and it will lead you on into Christian maturity.²

Paul's Sufferings (3:10–13)

PAUL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTES in the Pastorals serve several purposes. They demonstrate the sovereign grace of God in his life, acknowledge that faithful service does bring suffering, and provide a model for Timothy. The present passage accomplishes the second and third of those purposes. It opens with the emphatic "You, however," which calls Timothy as a witness to the difference between the false teachers just described and Paul's teaching and way of life. Paul chooses a verb (NIV "know all about") that means "to follow." As Knight observes, this word has a double sense, both of being with Paul to observe some of these things and "primarily, and more profoundly ... of the 'following' that takes place 'with the mind' and that 'understands' and 'makes one's own' that which one follows, as in 1 Timothy 4:6."

The word "teaching" stands first in a list of characteristics that are positive contrasts to the characteristics of the false teachers in verses 2–5. This word for teaching (*didaskalia*) is prominent in the Pastoral Letters, occurring fourteen other times (1 Tim. 1:10; 4:1, 6, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:1, 3; 2 Tim. 3:16; 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1, 7, 10). Not only is the occurrence of *didaskalia* at the beginning of this list important; it is repeated as the first important use of Scripture mentioned in verse 16.

As Paul's list progresses in verse 10, he is not flattering himself but rather showing where his values are, values that are not optional or relative but of absolute importance in the life of the Lord's servant. Not only Paul's teaching, but also his character distinguishes him from false teachers and the itinerant philosophers mentioned above. The word translated "way of life" occurs only here in the New Testament, but was common in classical literature. While "purpose" is not an unusual word (it occurs twelve times in the New Testament), its use here calls for attention because in 1:9 Paul has written of God's "purpose and grace" (see comments

² Stott, J. R. W. (1973). [*Guard the Gospel the message of 2 Timothy*](#) (pp. 92–105). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

there). We must understand God's purpose as revealed in Scripture and order our lives to follow that plan.

In place of the familiar "faith, hope, and love" Paul replaces "hope" with "patience" and after "love" writes "endurance." These four words convey the idea of waiting a situation out with steadfastness, an appropriate action for a person who has hope. Paul has already alluded to his sufferings in the Pastoral Letters, but these refer to events in specific cities that took place prior to Paul's meeting with Timothy in Lystra (Acts 13:14–52 [esp. vv. 45, 50]; 14:1–5, 8–20 [esp. v. 19]; 16:1–2).

Although Paul mentions that the Lord rescued him from these persecutions (v. 11), he makes the point in verse 12 that "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." This verse reinforces 1:8–12; 2:3, 9–10. It is striking that Paul cites the noun "persecutions" twice in verse 11 and a related verb once in verse 12. He moves from his own experience to that of Christians in general. The word *pantes* ("everyone") in verse 12 does not, in this context, mean everyone without exception, but rather everyone in general as opposed to just Paul himself. Persecution is not exceptional for those who want to live a life that is "godly" (the adverb *eusebos* has the same root as the word for religion or piety that is prominent in the Pastorals, see 1 Tim. 2:2; 3:16; 4:7–8; 6:3, 5, 6, 11; 2 Tim. 3:5; Titus 1:1).

Having moved from the sole figure of Paul to all those who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus, we now face the contrasting figures of "evil men and impostors" (v. 13). The NIV "while" (v. 13) translates the Greek *de*, which is usually translated "but." There is really a double contrast in this section: (1) between the godly in verse 12 and the evil people in verse 13, and (2) between those evil people in verse 13 and Timothy in verse 14. In addition to "evil" Paul describes these people as "impostors" (*goes*, a sorcerer or someone out to swindle the public) and describes them with two participles, "deceiving" and "being deceived." In this context *goes* clearly refers to people who make a practice of trying to mask their evil intentions to cheat others (see the contrasting attitude of Paul in 1 Thess. 2:3–5).

The tragedy of these impostors is compounded by the fact that they not only deceive but are themselves "being deceived." In a master stroke, Paul once again calls on the verb *prokopto* (lit., "make progress") to describe them ("will go from bad to worse"; see the related noun in 1 Tim. 4:15, used in a positive sense, and the verb *prokopto* in 2 Tim. 2:16, used sarcastically, as well as "not get very far" in 3:9).

The Importance of Scripture (3:14–17)

VERSE 14 BEGINS with the strong "but ... you" and contains a call to Timothy to consistency in doctrine and conviction. Not only had Timothy "learned" the truth from Paul and others, he had become "convinced" of it. The reason for this lies largely with the integrity of the people from whom he learned it, such as his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (1:5). Surely Paul has himself in mind also.

The "holy Scriptures" refer to what we know as the Old Testament and what the Jewish people call the *Tanach*. Jesus, during the forty days between his resurrection and ascension, taught how the Scriptures pertained to him (Luke 24:32, 44–47). Salvation does not come automatically from reading the Scriptures, but they "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

Verses 16–17 are the strongest statement in the Bible about itself. We understand that the word “Scripture” (*graphe*) includes the New Testament, since 2 Peter 3:16 cites the writings of Paul among the “Scriptures” (also *graphe*). The word translated “God-breathed” (*theopneustos*) in the NIV is more commonly translated “inspired,” which is less awkward but also less accurate. The term *inspired* is much too broad in its common usage today to convey the force of the Greek *theopneustos*, which is formed from *theo* (the root form of the word “God”) and *pneustos* (from a Greek root having to do with breathing).

The main exegetical issue is where to place the unexpressed verb “is” and how to interpret the Greek word *kai* (which can mean either “and” or “even, also”). The first option is to understand the unexpressed “is” as coming after “all Scripture,” so that the description “God-breathed” is true of all Scripture. In this case “God-breathed” and “useful” are *predicate adjectives*, joined by “and” (*kai*). The NIV adds a second understood “is” and thus renders this, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful....” This is the understanding also in NRSV, NKJV, NLT, NASB, JB, and others. The alternative is to understand the verb “is” as coming after “God-breathed,” and to understand the word *kai* to mean not “and” but “also.” In this case, “God-breathed” is understood as an *attributive* adjective—that is, it is part of the noun phrase and thus defines (and *limits*) the subject. In this case it means, “All God-breathed Scripture is also useful ...” (cf. REB, “All inspired Scripture has as its use ...”). This leaves open the possibility that there is other Scripture that is not inspired and therefore not useful.³

It can be argued that the most natural reading is the first. (1) If “God-breathed” were attributive, it would more normally have been placed before the noun “Scripture.” (2) “God-breathed and ... useful” is a balanced phrase in itself. Many other arguments have been made, however, and many statistics are offered on each side of the issue. The tendency over the past decades seems to be toward the first option, and modern translations offer that as the preferred rendering of the text. It has been argued that the main point of verse 16 is the usefulness of Scripture, not its inspiration. This is the logical direction of the text, but it is important to note that the inspiration of Scripture is foundational to its usefulness.

The first use of Scripture Paul lists is doctrinal (“teaching”; see v. 10 and comments). Its use for “rebuking” and “correcting” may not seem primary to the modern reader. However, given the major function of the Pastoral Letters to address the problem of false teaching in Ephesus and Crete, these functions have obvious significance. The appearance of these two words here is probably due to their strength and appropriateness in the overall context of correction. There may be a sequence intended here: first, refuting the false teaching that Timothy was confronting, and second, straightening everything out. The final item in the sequence is providing an ongoing “training in righteousness” (see the verbal form of the word “training” in Titus 2:11–14 and comments there). Structurally, “teaching” stands at the head of this series and the purpose of it all is expressed in verse 17, “for every good work.”

The importance of good works in the Pastoral Letters cannot be overemphasized. These are the marks of the genuine servants and people of God in contrast to the false teachers. This emphasis is consistent with the repeated theme of the blending of sound doctrine and godly living, which starts with the reference to purity, faith, and a good conscience in 1 Timothy 1:5–19, then is evident in the qualifications for elders and deacons (ch. 3), is important in the life of Timothy as an example in the church (4:6–16), is seen in the requirements for widows who are supported (5:3–10), and is stressed in many other passages.

Verses such as 1 Timothy 2:10; 5:10, 25; 6:18; 2 Timothy 2:21; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14 refer to good works. Other passages teach us that we are not saved by good works (2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5). Two ministries in particular are called (lit.) a “good work”—that of overseers (1 Tim. 3:1) and that of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5). To affirm the inspiration of Scripture and the importance of strong doctrinal teaching, therefore, has strong implications both for the correction of error and the pursuit of good works.³

Bridging Context

THE BOOK. THIS passage offers four separate pictures, which stand in contrast to each other. (1) The apostle Paul and those like him are being persecuted for his faith and life. (2) The persecutors are portrayed as “evil” and “impostors.” (3) Timothy and others like him are seeking to learn by reading this letter. (4) The fourth is not a portrait but a “still life” painting of a book—not just a book but *the* Book, which for two millennia now has encouraged those in the first picture, rebuked those in the second, and trained those in the third. The expression *still life*, while appropriate in artistic terms, is certainly inappropriate for the living Scriptures, which have brought life to untold millions of believers.

Verses 16 affirms that “all Scripture is God-breathed”; before and after that verse stand examples of what it can accomplish. It makes a person “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus,” and it has a series of functions—“teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”—that thoroughly prepares one “for every good work.” This encompasses the purpose expressed in Ephesians 2:8–10: *salvation* by grace through faith for *good works*.

The affirmation of inspiration at the center must not be isolated from this context of purpose. At the same time, one’s belief about the meaning of inspiration must not be camouflaged by exclusive emphasis on those purposes. We have concluded that the “Scripture” referred to here includes both Old and New Testaments because of the reference in 2 Peter 3:16 to Paul’s writings as “Scriptures.” No distinction is drawn in the New Testament between Paul’s letters and the other books as regards their divine origin and authority, so it is reasonable to apply 2 Timothy 3:16 to the entire Bible.

Defining an orthodox of Scripture. The period of reaction against “higher criticism” of the Bible saw successive attempts to define an orthodox doctrine of Scripture. (1) At first it seemed that a simple affirmation of Scripture as “inspired” would suffice.

(2) But the potential for vagueness in the meaning of that word made it insufficient, so the phrase “plenary (full) inspiration” came into use. That expression had the advantage of including the entire Bible in its affirmation, but still left some room for vagueness.

(3) “Verbal inspiration” clarified the extent and focus of inspiration beyond that of general ideas. This, however, introduced another misunderstanding, for “verbal” was sometimes misunderstood to mean “dictated.” This conjured up a caricature of the biblical writers as

³ Liefeld, W. L. (1999). [*1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*](#) (pp. 277–281). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

sitting with their minds in neutral, mechanically writing down words and syllables they heard from heaven. Such a process would have excluded such factors as individual style, feeling, and insight. It also encouraged the wrong use of the word “literal,” as in the question, “Do you believe that the Bible is literally true?” The intention of the question, of course, was to ask if one believes that every word is true, but if the question is taken “literally,” it really inquires whether a person thinks that all the literature in the Bible is literal as opposed to *figurative*.

(4) Much care is therefore needed in choosing terminology that explains the meaning of inspiration accurately over against inadequate definitions and concepts. One definition that has gained wide acceptance is “inerrancy.” Yet even this term raises questions. Does it mean that whatever appears in Scripture is true, whether regarding history, science, or theology, or does it apply to theological truths but allows, for example, for inadequate scientific knowledge on the part of ancient writers? Few would have a problem with such an expression as “as the sun set,” for we accept that as an accommodation to a commonly observed phenomenon. But this introduces detailed discussions, such as whether the mustard seed is actually the “smallest of all seeds” (Matt. 13:32, NLT) universally, or only in Palestine, or only in the span of Jesus’ knowledge. Such issues are not ignored by those who use the term *inerrancy*, but at the same time they prefer to focus on what Scripture specifically affirms, especially about itself, taking literary form and genre as well as purpose into consideration.

In the process of dealing with such literary implications of various views of inspiration is the theological implication of the Greek word *theopneustos* (“God-breathed”). Can what is God-breathed contain error? The term *inerrant*, clumsy though it is, specifically addresses that question. Such discussions have occupied theologians and biblical scholars for decades, and rightly so. Meanwhile, the Scriptures are doing their work of leading people to salvation through faith in Christ and on to training for every good work.⁴

Contemporary Significance

THE UNIQUENESS OF the Bible. In the days when street preachers were a common sight in New York City a man named Charlie King could sometimes be seen running around his hat, which was placed on a street corner near Times Square, shouting, “It’s alive! It’s alive!” When a crowd gathered he would pick up his hat, under which was a Bible and from which he would proceed to preach the gospel. At about the same time, a Christian organization in New York City that evangelized high school students was encouraging Christian students, however embarrassing it might seem, to carry a Bible with a red cover on top of their school books. In other quarters, evangelical churches, educational institutions, and other organizations were building statements into their creeds on the inspiration and authority of Scriptures, often incorporating the word “inerrant.”

⁴ Liefeld, W. L. (1999). [*1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*](#) (pp. 281–283). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

Any one of these attempts to feature the Holy Scriptures could have drawn criticism or ridicule, but each was a deliberate attempt to proclaim the unique importance of the Bible. There are many ways we can do this today; but **unless the Word of God is obeyed, preached, and taught as it should be, we are neither giving it due honor nor letting it do its job.** Bible societies like the International Bible Society (which distributes the NIV), Bible publishers like Zondervan (which publishes the NIV), Wycliffe Bible translators and other missionaries who translate the Scriptures, Sunday school teachers who explain it, preachers who proclaim it—and everyone who studies it, lives it, teaches it, raises a family based on its teachings, witnesses from it, and prays to God and praises him from its message—all have a significant part in the application of Scripture.

Biblical preaching and teaching. Whether or not preachers choose a straight expository style, every sermon should bring the Bible to bear on whatever topics are discussed. We may say that good sermons come both from above and from below. They come from above (from the Lord) in that they have their source and their authority in the written Word of God; they come from below (i.e., where we live) in that the themes they deal with come in part from the experiences and needs of the congregation. A sermon that is not applied to contemporary life or that lacks contemporary significance may be a fine exposition of Scripture, but it is not an expository *sermon*, which, by definition, takes the circumstances of the hearer into consideration. A book that deals with computer circuitry or computer language may have technical excellence, but it is of little benefit to the user if it does not explain how to put the computer to use.

The other side of the coin is that exhortations have no substance, basis, or authority if they lack specific biblical foundation. Further, while a sermon on a single text can have great force, if we expect the listener to go home and derive further direction from Scripture, preachers must show how the text arises from the immediate and larger context and how to both understand and apply it. Whether or not a Sunday school student will love and study the Scriptures over a lifetime may in large measure be determined by how well the teacher both motivates and enables students to study on their own (yes, even children, if they are of an appropriate age level).

Teaching child and adult classes is not a privilege for the doctrinally elite. Bible classes can be unutterably boring if the teacher lacks the skills and motivation to make them interesting and relevant. (Someone once said that it is a sin to make the gospel boring!) The most mature and knowledgeable Christian is not necessarily the most competent teacher. It is not only a brave but a responsible pastor who is willing to disappoint a would-be teacher who is not competent or prepared, in order to foster the teaching ministry of someone who may be less mature but more inspiring and willing to prepare well. If we are going to have teachers who have known Scripture from their infancy (v. 15), we certainly have the means to motivate and equip them, provided that we are willing to devote ourselves to that significant task. Much as the church may trumpet the doctrine of biblical inspiration, unless we all live it and unless it is taught enthusiastically and skillfully, we may produce a result opposite to what we desire.

We may have expected that the final effect of a proper use of the Scriptures would be doctrinal maturity or knowledgeable ministry. Instead, Paul once more encourages good works (v. 17), showing that God is mainly interested in the life and actions of the believer, not simply or even primarily in professional church ministry. It is no accident that this passage on Scripture

occurs in conjunction with the pictures of the persecuted Christian, the persecuting opponent, and the person who serves God. The Bible contains many pages of narratives concerning ordinary people who live, work, and walk in God's presence. It is these examples, along with specific doctrinal teachings, that equip us "for every good work."⁵

⁵ Liefeld, W. L. (1999). [*1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*](#) (pp. 283–285). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.