

¹⁰ 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.

God's Word Keeps Us Faithful in Faithless Times

1. Paul is an example for Timothy
2. Timothy is an example for us

There's a window in the Seminary chapel in Mequon that came to mind when I read these verses. It's clear glass, and etched into the glass is the image of a church. The church is surrounded by churning water. Waves are splashing up onto the sides, threatening to topple it.

You almost wonder how it's still standing. But then you look more closely, and you notice what the church is built on. It's a solid rock foundation that the waters can't move.

That's a picture of the Holy Christian Church – the kingdom of all believers here on earth – isn't it? You and I are a part of it. We're surrounded by a sinful, faithless world that is constantly crashing up against us – and all the more strongly in these last days before Christ's return. That's really what Paul is describing in the second lesson today: People go from bad to worse. Their hatred for us grows. They persecute us. They twist God's Word to make it fit their own sinful desires, and lead as many people astray as they can.

How do we stand firm in times like these? How do we remain faithful? Well, don't lose sight of what we're standing on: "The foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself as chief cornerstone," Paul wrote to the Ephesians. God's Word, with Jesus Christ as the heart and core of that message – that's our sure foundation. God placed us on that foundation when he brought us to faith through his Word. And God is the one who keeps us standing firm, even in times like these, through that same Word.

I. Paul is an example for Timothy

Paul is a wonderful example of that, and he wants Timothy to take note of it. In the verses just before this, Paul warned Timothy against the influence of the sinful world around him: There were lovers of themselves, lovers of money, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, people who were proud, without self-control, opposing God's Word.

But what about Paul? He writes to Timothy, ¹⁰ **You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance...** Wouldn't you have loved to have met Paul, to have seen him in action? Timothy had that firsthand experience. He had studied under Paul and traveled with him. From what the bible tells us, we can come to the same conclusion Timothy did: Paul was faithful. He was an upright Christian man. He taught God's pure Word, he lived a model Christian life of patience and love, his purpose was to always to save souls.

And that focus didn't change under persecution. Paul says **[you know about my] persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured.** Those cities are in Timothy's neck of the woods – he was

from Lystra. So he knew how in Antioch, the Jews had thrown Paul out of town; in Iconium, they had plotted to take his life; and in Lystra, they had stoned him, dragged him outside the city, and left him for dead. In all that, Paul stood firm.

What point is Paul making to Timothy with this list? He's not boasting in himself, is he? He's boasting in the Lord. "I can do everything" Paul wrote – how? – only "through him who gives me strength." God was the one keeping Paul faithful, and he did it through the Word. Don't you think that was part of Paul's "way of life" Timothy noticed, too? How Paul went back to the cross every day and got his strength from it? How Paul knew his bible front to back, but still took time to read it?

God hadn't just kept Paul faithful; God had continued to be faithful to his promises to Paul. That was another thing Paul wanted Timothy to realize from his example: God always keeps his end of the bargain. God promised to protect Paul from his enemies, and that's what he did. **Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them** he said of his persecutions. God promised that his Word would be effective, and it was. Even in those cities where Paul was persecuted—Antioch, Iconium, Lystra – congregations of believers sprang up, and Timothy was among them.

II. Timothy is an example for us

Paul wanted Timothy to remember that, because he would be facing the same things. 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.** The same sinful world – going from bad to worse – would confront Timothy. The same sinful world would persecute him.

And now Paul includes us here. "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted..." The way that Paul describes the world – lovers of self, lovers of money, lovers of pleasure, people going from bad to worse – just turn on your TV or look out the window. We're surrounded by those sinful influences every day.

And what about persecution? Don't think that what Paul says here doesn't apply to us just because we're not being stoned and thrown in prison – at least not yet. We are persecuted. The world hates what the bible has to say – that we're accountable to God for our actions, that God created the world in six days, that homosexuality is a sin, that all religions aren't the same and only Jesus saves. And they hate us for believing those things.

Paul isn't trying to discourage Timothy or us. He's warning us, isn't he? The world we live in threatens our faith. There's a constant pressure to believe like they do and to live like they do.

So how do we stay faithful in times like these? The truth is that *God keeps us* faithful through his Word. Listen to what Paul tells Timothy. 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.** Many of us sitting here this morning are a lot like Timothy. His mom and his grandma taught him, from his infancy on, the truths of Scripture. And you can remember how your parents and pastors and teachers did the same, can't you? You remember the picture-bible stories before bedtime, you can still see the flannel graphs and sing the songs you learned in Sunday School, you can still recite the bible passages you learned in Confirmation Class.

Even if you don't have those memories – if you learned those things later in life – what Paul says here applies. That's how God made you wise for salvation, isn't it? That's how the Holy Spirit poured God's grace into your heart and pointed you to Christ, the Lamb of God who carried all your sins to the cross with him and paid for them there by his suffering and death. That's how he taught you that Jesus rose from the dead, conquering sin, death, and hell forever, flinging heaven's gates open wide for you.

There's comfort in what Paul says here – what you need to know for your salvation, God has already made known to you in his Word. But there's also a caveat. Since we know these things, we might start to think we're in like Flynn. No more bible stories or memory work for us. We've graduated. Now we just come to church on Sundays. And even there, when the pastor's preaching, do you sometimes find yourself thinking, "I've heard this before. I already know this"?

Luther didn't think that way. One day his son, little Hans, came running up to him, all proud of himself. He said to him, "Daddy, I know my catechism by heart." Luther – the man who wrote the catechism – said, "Then you're better than I am. I still need to study it every day.

Can you ever get enough of God's Word? Can you ever stop hearing about God's love for you in Christ? Is there ever a day you don't need the full and free forgiveness God offers you in the bible?

The answer is: "No!" Paul tells Timothy, "Continue in what you've learned." Keep on hearing those same Bible stories. Dig out your Catechism notes, and review them. That's how God keeps you standing firm in the faith.

What reasons does Paul give Timothy for staying in God's Word? **All Scripture is God-breathed...** What Timothy had learned – what we've learned – it's not just what our parents passed along to us. It's what God himself is saying to us. Every word of the Bible is God's Word – not myths or stories, but the truth. God wants us to live in that truth, to make it the foundation of everything we do in life – not just to run to it when the waves start crashing, and then leave it behind when the going is smooth – but to live on it.

And because it's *God's* Word, it's powerful, effective, and, Paul says, **useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness.**

Sometimes we might be tempted to think, "What God says here doesn't apply to me." But what does God say? All Scripture is useful. The question is: How is it useful to me? Is God teaching me some truth about himself? Or is he telling me something about myself? Is he rebuking me – is he pointing out my sinfulness, or some sin that I'm still committing, and calling me to repentance? Is he correcting me, restoring me, showing me Christ and the forgiveness he's won for me? Is he training me in righteousness, teaching me how to live a God-pleasing life?

God does all of that for us through his Word **so that [we] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.** God's Word is all we need. There's nothing lacking. Like Paul says, through his Word he's equipped us with the shield of faith, the belt of truth, the helmet of salvation, so we can stand firm against the pressures of a sinful world and continue to live a godly life. Our sword is the Word itself, so we can fight back when the devil tempts us. This is how he keeps us faithful in the faithless times we're living in, and keeps us on the path to heaven.

So continue in what you've learned. Stand firm on that sure foundation on which God has placed you. Stay in the Word. That's how God keeps you as his child and strengthens your faith in Jesus. Then – just like the church in that seminary window – when waves come, you won't be moved. Amen.