

## Learning, Living, and Ministering from the Scriptures

In this series of articles on 2 Timothy 3:16-17, I've called our attention to the fact that this is Paul's last inspired letter. Paul writes to Timothy, his child in the faith, with the desire to remind Timothy that—no matter what happens—we can never neglect the word of God. It's the word of God that, by God's own design and plan, will transform lives as the Spirit is working along with the regular and healthy intake of the word. We've seen from this passage that God does his work in our lives through the *teaching* of the word. We were reminded that the word of God must first be revealed to our minds but, by grace, it doesn't stop there. The word is meant to penetrate our hearts and therefore, have a positive impact on our lives. Along with the teaching of the word, we were reminded by Paul that the word of God reproves us. The word reproof pertains to the way that the word works to convict us of our sin so that our lives will be lived in ongoing repentance because we sin daily in thought, word, and deed. God's word rips open our hard hearts, as it were, and exposes our sin but it doesn't leave us there.

Even though God's word convicts us of our sin, as we went forward in the text last time, we were reminded that God's word is meant to heal us. In other words, God's word brings *correction*. God intends to bring ongoing healing in lives ravaged by sin. The Master Surgeon exposes the wounds and brokenness of our hearts and continually brings healing. Lastly, we saw that the word of God brings *training in righteousness*. We saw that this entire process has a goal in mind. God is preparing us—not merely and only for a future in heaven—but he is preparing us, even now, for kingdom life and service. Salvation is not merely for us but, by grace, God intends that we positively impact the lives of others. What should we take away from Paul's faithful instruction to the church?

—From 2 Timothy 1:14 we learn that we're to “guard the good deposit (pattern of sound words) that has been entrusted to us.” The Scriptures guide us in how we're to worship God. They're our guide to discern truth from error. We must all be aware of right teaching and be committed to truth. Certainly, this is a major responsibility of church leaders. We must not allow the culture to wrongly inform our lives or our shepherding.

—From 2 Timothy 2:1-2 we see that we must continue to pass on God's word to “faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Although the initial context of this verse points to future pastors and elders, it can also be applied to all those who come to hear the gospel and then pass it on to others from generation to generation.

—Paul reminds us in 2 Timothy 3:1 that we'll suffer as Christians. “...in the last days there will be times of difficulty.” As you stand strong on the Word of God, don't expect your Christian life to be always and only a bed of roses. There certainly should be joy in the midst of our pain, but we won't avoid pain and suffering.

—We must always seek to minister in the lives of others by being kind and “not quarrelsome” (2:14, 24). There’ll be times of correcting, but it *must* always be done with “complete patience and gentleness” (4:2). At this point, I especially want to remind all pastors and church leaders who may be reading this article. We’re ministering out of God’s truth, but that truth must be ministered with gentleness, *patience*, and kindness. Be always aware that we can be too hasty and not allow for the fact that all of us grow in our spiritual walk at different paces. There’ll be nothing but discouragement and hurt if we’re trying to minister with an iron hand. Hard conversations will sometimes need to take place, and we want them to take place with a view toward repentance and reconciliation. As Paul writes in Ephesians 4:15, we’re to, “speak the truth in love.” We must also be careful to remember that God’s word is our *only* authority. We rely on the principles and precepts of the word. We must never confuse God’s truth with our opinion if our opinion stands in opposition to God’s word. A great part of maturity for all of us is understanding the difference between what we may believe to be a good idea versus what can be shown to be true based on solid, biblical teaching.

—All Christians must honor God by avoiding irreverent talk, i.e., empty or useless talk (2:16) which will spread like gangrene through the church. This “godless chatter” as it’s been translated, is any talk that moves us away from God. We desire and cultivate God honoring conversations. Conversations that are meant to build up and not to tear down.

—We’re to be examples of living godly lives for others to follow. “You, however, have followed by teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, and steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings.....” (3:10, 11a). Certainly, officers are to be godly examples, but we’re all called to be examples to one another. It matters how we live our lives, and we should set a godly example in word and deed in our homes, in the church, and in the society around us.

—Don’t grow complacent in your Christian lives and service. Paul charges Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:6 to “fan into flame” the gifts that God has given. And the analogy is obvious. We want to be living lives that are aflame with a godly passion to love God and neighbor. We don’t want to have simmering, lukewarm lives of complacency. As we conclude this series, I encourage all Christians to rightly rest in the perfect and finished work of Jesus Christ. And yet, it matters how we grow in God’s word which will affect how we live our lives. It is the desire of Paul that the pastors and church leaders, as well as all the congregation, continue to hunger and thirst after God’s word so that, by grace, all of our lives will consist of learning, living, and ministering from the Holy Scriptures.

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