

Continuing in the Truth of the Word

II Timothy 3:10-17

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III](#)

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to II Timothy, chapter three, verse ten.

Have you ever composed in your mind the last words that you were going to say to someone? Really—the last words. They were getting ready to depart this life; may have been a friend you're going to see in the hospital, and you knew that this might be the last time that you would be with that friend. Or maybe it was a friend from another land. You knew that in parting, it was unlikely, unless the Lord brought about some extraordinary providence, that He would put the two of you back together in the same place; and you knew that in this world this might be the last time. And you wanted to say just the right things: you wanted to say the things that expressed your love, and you also wanted to say the things that would give Christian encouragement and praise to God. Or, maybe...maybe you've had a dying friend express to you his or her last words. It's one of the privileges that I've had here at First Presbyterian Church, to have dying saints say to me last words—things that they wanted to be remembered after they had left this world and gone home to be with their heavenly Father. Some of them have literally left those last messages to me on voicemail, and I've played them over and over to myself, and even had them transcribed so that I can remember those last words: words of faith, words of encouragement.

Last words are significant. If you've had an opportunity to give last words to a friend or a loved one, or to receive last words from a friend or a loved one, you are blessed, indeed; especially if that friend or loved one is one in Christ, one who's resting and trusting in Christ alone for salvation as he or she has received in the gospel.

And so, today I want us to be mindful of the fact that we are in the last of Paul's last words. We've said all along, this is Paul's last letter. The whole letter in a sense is comprised of Paul's last words to Timothy, but Paul knows now, by the time he gets to chapter three, that he's wrapping up his last words. These are the last of the last words, and you know how when you are gathering in your mind that thing to say to that friend how you want to say the most important things, and you want to say them just right. Paul's aware of that. And so, I want you to watch especially closely from verse 10 of chapter three all the way to the end of this book—watch what Paul says; watch how he says it, because Paul is in a situation

where he has an opportunity to carefully compose precisely what he wants to say as his final words to Timothy, this dear son in the faith.

And, of course, the Apostle Paul is not just writing as a brilliant, faithful, wise, experienced pastor and Christian, and theologian; he is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. These are not simply Paul's words, these are God's words to Timothy; but as we'll see in this very passage, they're not just God's words to Timothy; they're God's words to you and me. So let's hear them carefully.

This is the word of God:

But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me! And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts. Let's pray, and ask His blessing now on His word.

Lord God, we thank You for this Your word, and we ask that You would cause us to receive it for what it is: the very truth of God; and that it is proclaimed, we would heed it to Your glory and our eternal good. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Apostle Paul in this passage is giving his last words—the last of his last words, and he is gathering to mind the things which are most important to say to this dear, young, faithful Christian. And you will notice in this passage that though what he says to Timothy is particularly appropriate for a person whose job is to preach and teach God's words, that Paul's words are appropriate for every Christian. They're appropriate to every disciple, because these words in this passage are a call to discipleship. They call not just Timothy, but you and me to be a disciple. They call not just Timothy, but you and me to expect opposition from this world. They call, not just Timothy, but you and me to expect false teachers always to be around us doing their dead level best to confuse people, and they call us to live by the Book. And I want to look with you this morning at just two or three things out of this rich, rich passage. Next week, God willing, we

will look at verses 16 and 17 because it is so important for us as a congregation not just to know what historic orthodox Christians have always thought about the word of God, but it is important for us as a congregation—every single one of us—to believe with every fiber of our being what good orthodox Christians have known for twenty centuries: that God teaches about His word in His word.

And so, we're going to spend the whole message next Lord's Day just seeing what God says in these two verses about His word, because I want everyone in this congregation to believe with every fiber of your being what God says about His word in His word, because His word is that firm foundation about which we have just sung; and without that firm foundation, you are in big trouble in this world. So we're going to come back and look at that next week.

I. A word of encouragement regarding the Christian's "following"

But this week, I want you to see three things, and the first thing is this: Paul calls us to be disciples in verses 10 and 11 and 12. Paul calls us to be disciples in verses 10-12. Here is Paul's word of encouragement to Timothy as a minister of the gospel, but just as a Christian, as well—here's his word of encouragement to Timothy to be a follower of him. Paul is saying, 'Timothy, I want you to follow me, and following me is going to mean emulating me in nine areas.' Did you count them up as we read through it?

Paul says, 'Timothy, when you follow me, follow me in these nine areas. Emulate my life. Be ready to follow.' That's what a disciple is: a disciple is a follower. Jesus constantly issues the call for Christians to be disciples.

Our great concern at First Presbyterian Church, as we yearn for conversions, as we yearn for people to trust in Jesus Christ, as we yearn for people to be saved eternally through the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, is not simply that they would sign cards or pray prayers, or make decisions; we want them to be disciples. Jesus said, "Go, therefore, and make disciples...." Jesus' call, His gospel call, is a call to discipleship. And so Paul is spelling out here what it means to be disciples. Jesus does the same in His own teaching, but here's Jesus' principle of discipleship being worked out in the words of the Apostle Paul, and he's not just saying this to Timothy, he's saying it to you and me: 'Follow me in this way.'

In contrast to those false teachers that we've just talked about in the previous verses, 'Timothy, you follow me in this way. You take me as a model. You adhere to me. You listen to what I have to say.'

And look at these nine things: 'You follow my teaching.' He's contrasting. 'Timothy, in contrast to those people who have been led astray by false prophets, you have followed my teaching—now, keep on doing that. You followed my

teaching—the authoritative teaching of Paul, the gospel that he preached. The disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ doesn't run after every fad and trend that false prophets use to tickle your ears with. A true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ wants the meat of the word of God. Is that what you want today? Do you want it high-octane? You don't want 'gospel lite', you want the whole nine yards? Is that what you want? Paul is saying, 'Timothy, you follow my teaching. You follow the teaching, the gospel that I preach.' That's what a Christian disciple does: he follows in the way of the Lord in the teaching of the word in all its fullness, the whole counsel of God. That's what a disciple wants. Paul's contrasting Timothy to these false prophets and these false Christians that he has described in the previous verses. 'Timothy, you followed my teaching. Now, keep on doing that.'

And then he says, 'You followed my conduct.' He's saying, 'Timothy, you didn't just say that you believed the things that I taught. You have lived like I live. Now, keep on doing that.' That's what a disciple does: a disciple lives like his master; a disciple emulates his master in his life.

My friend, there is nothing that we need more in the church today, in this church today, than Christians who will live the truth of the word of God in their daily lives.

The thing which compromises our witness, not just to the world out there, but to the world right around us, is our lives. And the Apostle Paul is saying, 'You want to be a disciple? Live like I live.'

I'll never forget it—it was during seminary, and a professor was preaching a message on prayer, and at the end of that message on prayer, after giving several very specific challenges to us as a student body about what we ought to be doing as future ministers in our practice of prayer—and after giving some examples from his own life and experience, he said something I had never heard a minister say. He concluded his sermon with these words: "Do as I do." We were pinned to our chairs! It's not very often that you hear a minister say, "Do as I do."

He was saying, 'This is an area in which the Lord has given me grace to be faithful in, so you emulate me, not because I'm great, not because I've done something, but because this is an area that the Lord had given me grace to be faithful in, so you emulate me.'

Well, this is exactly what Paul is saying to Timothy. He's saying, 'Timothy, you do as I do.' And he's saying that to you, as well: 'You follow me. You look at my life, and you emulate me.'

He doesn't stop there, does he? He goes on to a third thing: 'Timothy, you followed my purpose.' You know, in Acts 14:12 and many other passages, the Apostle Paul indicated his purpose: he was determined to take the gospel as far as the Lord would let him take it. He wanted to see Gentiles converted. He

wanted to see Jews converted. He was ready to lay down his life so that people would come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. In fact, he said, 'Lord, if You would save all of Your ancient people—my kinsmen in the flesh, the children of Israel—if You would bring all of them savingly to Christ, I would be personally willing to be damned, if You would just bring them to Jesus Christ.' And the Apostle Paul is saying, 'Timothy, you followed me in that purpose. I see it in your heart; I see it in your life.'

You know, there are some people that you meet, and you know what their purpose in life is. And there are other people that you meet, and it takes you longer to figure out what their purpose in life was. Paul is saying, 'Timothy, I see that your purpose in life is my purpose in life: we live for the glory of God. We live to see people converted to Jesus Christ and built up in the grace and truth of Jesus Christ. Now, Timothy, you keep on doing it. You keep on in that purpose.'

Disciples share the purpose of their master. Jesus said, "It is My meat to do the will of Him who sent me." So if we're Jesus' disciples, then our purpose, our meat, is going to be the same purpose and meat of Jesus. And that's what Paul is saying to Timothy—that he's going to be a disciple in embracing his teaching, his conduct, his life, his purpose.

He doesn't stop there, though, does he? He goes on to say, 'You followed my faith.' Paul's belief, Paul's trust in God, Paul's trust in the redeeming truth of the word of God, Paul's faith in Christ—Paul was a man who lived by faith. He knew that faith was important, because "without God we can do nothing. But all things are possible through Him who strengthens us." And so Paul lived by faith. He lived attempting things that he did not have the capacity to accomplish in his own power, because he trusted God. His salvation was by faith, but his whole life was by faith. And so he's saying to Timothy, 'Timothy, I've seen that in you. You've followed me in that faith. Now keep on following. That's what a disciple does. A disciple lives by faith.'

He doesn't stop there. He goes on. There's a fifth thing: Patience. 'You followed my patience.' Now, that refers to patience with people. And Timothy had opportunities galore to see how patient Paul was with people. You know, this is an enormously striking thing to me, because this man Paul had more drive than anybody I've ever met, and I've met some folks with drive in my time. And folks with drive are not folks that are patient with people! In fact, very often those of us who appreciate people with drive appreciate them despite the fact that they're not patient enough. We recognize, 'Lord, we are going to have to put up with a little bit of stuff, because this brother, this sister, has drive! He/she knows what he's about. I am plumb delighted at what he or she is about, and so I'm going to put up with the impatience that comes along with that package, because I can see that You're going to use this person to bless Your people and to bless Your kingdom, and so I'm just going to put up with it for a little while.'

And the Apostle Paul is saying here, 'Timothy, you've seen my patience with people.' Well, let me tell you what, friends: That patience is proof of the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a person, because this man has drive, and yet he's patient! He's not only patient with struggling Christians, he's patient with people who persecute him! With people who oppose him! And the Apostle Paul says, 'Timothy, if the grace of God is at work in your life, you're going to manifest that same kind of patience with people, because people are the hard thing in the Christian life and ministry. And so, be patient, Timothy. That's what a disciple is: a disciple is completely sold out to the purposes of God, but that disciple is also patient with people. Now, you follow me in that patience, Timothy. You be forbearing with the people of God, because the people of God can be a little recalcitrant sometimes, a little hard to get along with, a little disappointing.

Sixthly, he goes on: 'You followed me in love, Timothy. I've seen you emulate my life of love. Now, keep on doing it.' That's what a disciple does. A disciple has a true concern for others' best interests, deep sympathy for people, even persecutors. And again, this is one of the things I love about the Apostle Paul, and I love it wherever I see this characteristic in the hearts and lives of Christians. When I see a person who is consumed with faithfulness to and concern about the truth of God and has joined with that a practical, tangible love for people, I want to dance in the streets, because usually you see one or the other of those things in imbalance in the Christian life. You get a person who's loving, but they could not pull the trigger on making a good, wise, discriminating judgment about Scriptural truth to save their necks; or, you get a person who's ready to debate minutiae of truth without a loving concern and tangible expression of the desire to do good and to seek the wellbeing of other people. And here the Apostle Paul is showing a concern for truth and love, wrapped up together. So notice: Truth in life; truth in patience; truth and love—they go together—forbearance with people, but also a true concern for others' best interest, a deep sympathy for people. And Paul's saying that's what a disciple looks like. A disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ is concerned to hold fast to the truth and to show practical love.

And, there's endurance: steadfast perseverance amidst trying circumstances. If patience (two things up in this list) refers to patience with people, then endurance refers to patience in circumstances: that when you run into the trials of life, you keep on. You're patient. You endure despite those circumstances. You have the grace from God to hold up and hold on in those circumstances. That's what a disciple does.

And then, look at these last two things: Persecutions and Sufferings—the physical and mental afflictions of a world at enmity with God. Paul says, 'Timothy, I have seen how you've endured under persecution just like I have. Keep on doing that.'

Sufferings: that which is endured for the sake of Christ...the losses and crosses of life. And the Apostle Paul says that's what a disciple is. 'Timothy, I've seen that

in you. Keep on doing it. Follow me in this. Be a disciple. Manifest these characteristics.'

Now I want to say something about those last two things, because Paul elaborates on them himself in verses 11 and 12. He reminds Timothy, for instance, that the Lord has always been faithful to preserve him from persecutions. You remember—the first time Timothy probably met Paul was in the context of Acts 14, when Paul had been left for dead outside the city.

Have you ever had an event happen that was just emblazoned on your heart or your mind's eye and you could never get it out? It might have been remembering where you were when you heard that Kennedy was shot, or it might be where you were when Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon, or it might be where you were when you heard of that loved one who was diagnosed with cancer, or it may be some other event in your life where you remember it...it's like it was a second ago. It's just burned into your being. You remember.

Paul says, 'Now remember, Timothy, I've suffered a persecution or two in my life.' And it immediately flashes Timothy back, because Timothy, you see, was converted because Paul was willing to be beat almost to death to take the gospel to his home city. And Timothy maybe remembers seeing the bruises and the stripes healing on Paul...that Paul paid so that he could take the gospel to Timothy so that Timothy could be converted and become a minister of the gospel. Paul reminds Timothy of that, but he's reminding Timothy of the Lord's providence.

But he's also reminding Timothy—he's reminding Timothy, he's setting Timothy's expectations: 'Timothy, be ready for this kind of treatment.' That's what a disciple does.

Now, you're saying today, I've never been persecuted. We're sitting here today, so we haven't been martyred. I haven't been beat. I haven't lost my job. I haven't been persecuted. But Satan has many ways to persecute you. We must all be ready to stand firm. Satan is wise in the way he persecutes.

Young people, without anybody ever holding a stick over you to beat you, or a gun to your head or a knife to your throat... if you seek to be godly in this life, I assure you, you will feel the pressure of the opposition of Satan in the world.

When I was in high school—and I look back on my high school time with many, many regrets because I wasted so many opportunities to be a more faithful disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to do things and say things that would have brought Him honor; so I don't look back to my high school years and pat myself on the back. But, by the grace of God, a few things I was able to do, the Lord used for witness.

One of the things was simply not going along with the tide of the young people in my high school in their constant binge drinking on the weekends, and it seemed to bother them that I didn't do that. I was on the football team, I was all-this and all-that, and so I had a modicum of popularity with the students, but it bothered them that I did not go along with what they were doing on the weekends, and so they made a point of bringing that fact up to me constantly. It was like they could not be happy getting drunk unless I got drunk with them! I never understood that!

In fact, I remember going out to take a friend out on a date. (She really didn't "like" me; she liked somebody else, but she was accepting a date with me for consolation.) I remember going—(and her mother had worked for my Dad many years ago, and we'd been friends for a long time.) And I went over to pick her up at the house. She was still getting ready, and so I stood in the kitchen and talked with her dad.

Her dad said to me, "You know what I want to do, Ligon?"
"No, Mr. Perkins."

"I want to take you out on my boat with two cases of beer, get you drunk, and see you throw up over the side!"

Now, he said it not quite so delicately as that! And I thought to myself, "Party on, dude, that sounds like a great time!"

I could not conceive why a supposedly mature adult would have this deep desire to see me drunk and throwing up.

Now, let me say that that constant drip was a pressure, and I know that with regard to alcohol and drugs and sex and a variety of other very, very ungodly lifestyles, that kind of pressure is on our young people in high school and what used to be called junior high and in college all the time. You don't have to have somebody hold a knife to your throat to face the opposition of the world, and if you're going to live a godly life, you're going to stand against that. You're not going to go along.

And, my friends, if you go along and your conscience doesn't bother you, let me tell you what: You're not a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me just tell you right now, if you can go along with that and see no contradiction with what it means to be a disciple, then you've never known what it is to be a disciple.

Now, refraining from those things is not going to get anybody to heaven, and there are many people who have been saved out of those things into glory. But, my friends, caving in to those things, caving in to those pressures without any remorse, without any tinge of conscience, may just be God's way of saying you've never known grace. You've never known the gospel. You've never known Jesus; because, my friends, disciples don't live like the world without remorse,

without repentance, without regret.

And I want to tell you that in this culture—and I've never seen a culture where there's more pressure on our young people...junior high, high school, and college...if in this culture you don't feel some kind of opposition because of your Christian stand and profession, it may be that you're not living out your Christian stand and profession in the eyes of this world. Because if you do, I promise you that you will feel something of the same thing, because, I want to tell you what I went through in high school is nothing compared to what our high school and college students go through today.

No, if you're going to walk with Christ, if you're going to be a disciple of Christ, you will face opposition from this world. That's what a disciple is; that's what a disciple does. And the Apostle Paul is saying, 'Timothy, be a disciple.' And he's saying, 'You, Christian, here at First Presbyterian Church, be a disciple.' That's what a disciple looks like.

II. An exhortation to continue in the faith-once-delivered

Now, there's one more thing I want you to see. Look at verses 14 and 15. Paul goes on to say, "Continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Did you hear what he said? He said, 'Timothy, live by the Book. Live by the Book, because that Book will tell you the way of salvation, and that Book alone will tell you the way of salvation.' "...The sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation."

And we would be remiss if we did not pause right here today and say that if you will not embrace the gospel as it is offered in this Book, the Bible, there is no possibility of salvation. I know everyone in the world is saying, 'All roads lead up the mountain; many roads lead to Rome.' They're saying that all sorts of different ways will get you into fellowship with God; that as long as you're sincere, you'll go to heaven.

Here's what the Apostle Paul is saying: he's saying this Book alone, this Savior alone, will bring you into eternal fellowship with the one true God. And so, my friends, I urge you, I implore you, know this Book. Love this Book. Believe this Book. Trust in the Savior that this Book tells about. Trust in Him for salvation, because this Book is able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation.

You see, the Apostle Paul is saying to Timothy and he's saying to you and me, 'Be a disciple. And this is what a disciple looks like: A disciple loves the rich

teaching of the word of God, lives that teaching out in conduct in life, has a purpose to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, has faith in God, faith in Christ, faith in the Scripture; is patient with people, is loving towards God and towards people; endures trials, and even is willing to stand with God and Christ against the opposition and persecutions and sufferings the world brings against us. That's what a disciple is. Be a disciple.'

And then he's saying, 'Live by the Book. Be a disciple and live by the Book, because this Book alone will get you to God. This Book alone will tell you the way of salvation. This Book alone will point you to the Savior, the only Savior, that can save you from your sins.'

Now, my friends, Paul is there—months, weeks, days, maybe hours from his own execution—and he's thinking, 'What last words can I say to this dear man whom I love...words that will stay with him forever? Be a disciple, Timothy; live by the Book.'

And so I say to you, Christian, professing Christian, member of First Presbyterian, visitor to First Presbyterian: Be a disciple. Jesus said that His church was to go and make disciples and live by the Book, because only this Book tells you the way to be with God in joy forever.

Let's pray.

O Lord, it's in the gospel of Your Son that we find hope and assurance, eternal security and bliss; and we learn that gospel from Your Book. Help us to believe the truth that Paul has spoken this day. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Congregational hymn: *God in the Gospel of His Son*]

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be to you all. Amen.

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