**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**The Message Of 2 Timothy (12): “How to Stand Firm In The Faith”**

**2 Timothy 3:10-15**

**July 9, 2023**

Every Christian is called to be different from the world. But as we all know, the pressures to conform to the world’s way of thinking are colossal, and many Christians give in without even realizing what they are doing. First, they become friends of the world (James 4:3), which leads to loving the world (1 John 2:15), which makes it easy to conform to the world (Rom. 12:2).

The problem is compounded by the pervasive atmosphere of worldliness that is seeping into the church. As we saw in last week’s study, the devil has his operatives who have infiltrated our ranks. They have a depraved mind and a counterfeit faith. They are lovers of self, lovers of money, and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. They retain an outward form of religion but deny its regenerating power. They oppose the truth and seek to win the weak with their wicked lies. They are morally corrupt and are a fitting picture of our so-called “permissive society,” one which tolerates “every conceivable deviation from Christian standards of righteousness and truth” (Stott). That’s why Paul has said, “*Have nothing to do with them*” (3:5).

In the verses before us today, Paul takes this counsel one step further. He reminds Timothy of the safeguards that will enable him to withstand the evil forces that are opposing him and the church. First, he contrasts himself to the apostate teachers of the previous verses and reminds Timothy of what he has done thus far: “*But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance . . .*” (3:10ff). Then he reminds him of his early childhood training in the Scriptures and urges him to continue in what he has learned and believed (3:14-15). Following the right spiritual leaders and abiding in the truths of God’s Word are two essential safeguards against falling into falsehood. Without the safeguards in place, no one can stand firm in the faith.

**A. The First Safeguard: Following the Right Example (vv. 10-13).** As a genuine apostle who was following Christ (1 Cor. 11:1), Paul presents himself as the standard by which truth can be distinguished from falsehood. He also reminds Timothy that the godly will arouse the antagonism of the worldly.

*First*, Paul contrasts himself to the apostate teachers of the day (vv. 10-11). “*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*” (NASB). There are nine aspects of Paul’s life and ministry that Timothy has faithfully followed “step by step” (NEB):

* Paul’s *teaching* was the primary influence on young Timothy’s life and was surely Paul’s greatest gift. Beginning with Paul’s second missionary journey, he had closely followed the doctrinal instruction of Paul (Cf. Acts 16:1ff).
* Paul’s *conduct* always supported his teaching. Timothy knew Paul’s teaching was genuine because of the life that he lived and the sufferings he endured because of it.
* Paul’s *purpose*, since the day of his conversion, was never compromised. Even when his life was in danger, his goal was to carry out the commission the risen Christ had given him (Acts 26:19, 20).
* Paul’s personal *faith* enabled him to overcome every difficult circumstance. His *patience* enabled him to be long-suffering toward difficult and aggravating people, and his *love* was a genuine, sacrificial love for both God and his fellow believers (as opposed to the false teachers’ love for self, money, and pleasure).
* Paul’s *perseverance*, or steadfastness, enabled him to bear up under the most trying of circumstances, which naturally led to the *persecutions* and *sufferings* which he bravely endured. What comes to mind are the incidents “at Antioch, Iconium, and at Lystra.” These towns were located in Timothy’s native region, where he had the opportunity to see for himself or at least hear others tell of the apostle’s sufferings (Acts 13-14). In every instance the Lord protected and delivered Paul.

In verses 12 and 13, Paul also makes it clear that his experience was not unique: “*In fact, everyone who wants to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived*.” Yes, the godly will always arouse the antagonism of the world, just as Jesus Himself taught (John 15:18-20; 16:33).

There are exceptions, of course: **(a)** those who are “in Christ” but who are *detached from the world* are not persecuted. Why? Because they don’t get into any collisions with their potential persecutors (imagine you have a car, but you rarely drive it – especially in bad weather or at night); **(b)** those who are “in Christ” but who *compromise with the world* also are not persecuted. Why? Because the world sees nothing in them to persecute. Anyone who withdraws from the world or assimilates into the world will *escape* persecution. But for those who are in the world *and* in Christ, persecution (in one form or another) becomes inevitable.

The specific persecution Paul has in view is led by the activities of the false teachers. He is quite outspoken about them, labeling them “evil men” and “imposters.” They are “charlatans” (NEB), which means “quacks” and “frauds.” They themselves will become increasingly worse, leading others astray and being duped themselves by the god of this world (2 Cor. 11:2-3). Ironically, they begin by being deceivers, and in the end they are deceived by their own deceptions!

**B. The Second Safeguard: Abiding in the Truths of God’s Word (vv. 14-15):** “*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you have learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*.”

A Jewish boy would begin to study the Old Testament when he was five years old. But Timothy’s homeschooling began even before he reached this age. Lois (his grandmother), and Eunice (his mother) saw to that (Cf. 1:5). As a result, when Paul came to Timothy’s hometown of Lystra on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:8-18), the pump was primed. Everything Timothy learned from Paul was in harmony with the Old Testament Scriptures he had previously been taught.

The gospel that Paul preached was the gospel that God had “*promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David* . . .” (Rom. 1:2). In fact, Jesus taught that the entire Old Testament spoke about Him (the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings), predicting His suffering and His rising from the dead on the third day (Luke 24:45-47). Thus, when Timothy heard this good news announced by Paul, he came to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Cf. Acts 14:8-18; 16:1-3).

That’s why Paul says the Scriptures are able to make you “*wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*” This is in direct contrast to the false teaching which had arisen in the church, which leads only to useless disputes and ungodliness, something which Paul has stated throughout this letter. The more Timothy continues in what he has learned, first from the teaching of his grandmother and mother, and then from the Apostle Paul, the more he will be able to withstand the onslaught of the false teachers of his day. The same is true for us today. The Scriptures are the final safeguard against apostasy.

One final thought: in both sections of this passage (vv. 10-13 and 14-15), Paul begins by addressing Timothy with the same two little Greek monosyllables (*su de*), meaning “but as for you” (vv. 10, 14). In stark contrast to what Paul has just said about the culture of the day (vv. 1-9 and vv. 12-13), Timothy is called to be *different* and, if necessary, to *stand alone*. He is *not* to yield to the pressures of public opinion; nor is he to conform to the spirit of his age. Rather, he must stand firm in the faith.

Nothing is more needed by Christians in today’s church than this same courageous conviction. The “stressful times” in which we are living are *very* stressful. A proliferation of false teachings have flooded the church, which are energizing a pluralist and permissive mindset from within our own ranks. Many are being swept from their moorings by a floodtide of deception and error.

As a notable example, consider the website posted by one of the most historic churches in Galveston, TX. Formed in 1840, and now part of the Presbyterian Church USA, their invitation to “worship” reads as follows: “We are committed to being an open and affirming church for all of God’s children, regardless of their race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, or gender expression. All are welcome in all aspects of our church life, including baptism, communion, marriage, and ordination.”

“*But as for you* . . .” Paul continues to say to us (as he did to Timothy), remain steadfast in the faith! Never mind if the pressure to conform is overwhelming. You have followed my teaching and example thus far. Now continue in what you have come to believe. You also know the Scriptures. Even in the midst of these stressful times – in which evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse – follow the teaching of those Scriptures; and follow my apostolic teaching and example. If you stay on *that* course, you will remain steadfast in the faith!