

How Churches Faithfully Endure

2 Timothy 2:14-19

As Christians are called to persevere, so churches are called to faithfully endure. Paul shows us how.

LTS: Eph. 3:7-20

Intro:

On Oct. 10, 2018, Hurricane Michael slammed into the Florida Panhandle as a category 4 storm with maximum sustained winds of 155 MPH. The storm caused catastrophic damage from wind and storm surge, particularly in the the Panama City Beach and Mexico Beach areas. Video from the major News Networks on the following morning revealed a level of devastation seldom seen after a hurricane. Mexico Beach in particular was absolutely flattened. Homes and businesses were literally thrown into the local local canal. Nothing was spared. Nothing, that is, with the exception of one house that remained on the beachhead surrounded by devastation, but appearing as if it were practically untouched by the storm.

The fact is, however, that just like all the other structures around it, this house too was hit by the full fury of Hurricane Michael which packed wind gusts upwards of 200 MPH. And yet, there it stood. And to this day, there it stands. The locals now commonly refer to it as “The Sand Palace.”

How did this one beautiful white house survive the onslaught of a category 4 storm when all others were destroyed? Was it a fluke of nature? Was it a miracle of God? No. When questioned about it, the owner of the house (Lebron Lackey) explained that he had very carefully and intentionally built his house to withstand the greatest storm he could imagine. Instead of constructing walls out of wood, he used reinforced concrete. Instead of sinking his foundation piling, 20 feet into the ground, he set them at 40 feet. Everything was reinforced with steel cable, and the few windows in the structure were designed to survive maximum impact from flying debris.

Today it stands on Mexico Beach as a thing of beauty and a marvel of engineering. It also stands as a modern parable of the kind of life God wants Christians to construct, and the kind of churches he insists pastors should build.

For the past several weeks we have considered how to build a life that remains upright even in the stormiest seas. Today I want to talk with you about what it takes to

build a church that faithfully endures regardless of the forces that come to bear to do it harm.

Let's begin by standing together and reading our text.

Read 2 Timothy 2:14-19

As you know, at this point in Paul's life he is in jail awaiting execution. He knows his ministry is nearing the end, so he writes this letter to offer final instructions about what it means to be faithful in ministry. Most recently, he has offered instruction on Timothy's own life as a minister of the gospel and as a leader in the church. Now, however, Paul shifts over to the question of how to build a church that endures.

Now, obviously, a lot could be said about how to build a strong church that can weather the storms that beat upon it over the course of long years of ministry, but I am going to limit the discussion to concerns Paul reveals in the text before us.

So how does a faithful pastor build a church that endures? Well, first of all he has to be willing to...

I. Confront Spiritual Trouble-makers (14)

Read v. 14

1. Now I understand that in today's religious culture most pastors seem to feel like their primary role is to keep their congregations motivated and encouraged. And truth be told, I too want you to leave here week after week with a greater zeal for the Lord and a deeper joy in Jesus. But that is not the faithful pastor's only priority. We also have to say things people which we are not so sure they want to hear. And this is what Paul is instructing Timothy to do. And it isn't the first time.

2. Paul says, "Remind them of these things." What things? Well, he's referring to verses 11-13 where the message of the ancient hymn is both a word of encouragement to those who faithfully endure, and a dire warning to those who turn away.

3. But then Paul says, "And charge them before God not to quarrel about words." "Charge" here means to testify or warn. The NAS renders it "Solemnly Charge!" And the seriousness of the charge is ramped up by the words, "before God." Paul wants Timothy to bring a strong warning down upon certain men in the church who were

proving themselves to be spiritual Trouble Makers. And he was to do it knowing that God would be standing with him when he does. After all, this is the church for which His only begotten Son willingly died.

5. Why did they need to be confronted? Because they were arguing about “words.” They were engaging in heated word battles. What were they arguing about? Who knows? Did it have something to do with ancient Gnosticism? Who cares? The point is, there were men in the church who apparently lost the sense of awe and wonder of the gospel and the simplicity and purity of Christ and now had descended into useless arguments about things that don’t matter.

- A. I remember times in Seminary when I would sit in the student center during the lunch hour and listen to my fellow semiarrians argue - sometimes to the point of anger - about things I was convinced no one cared about.
- B. And it seemed to me that the reason they cared about them was simply because they loved to spar in hopes of showing themselves to be the smartest people in the room. I hated those discussions. And Frankly, it made me question whether all of the theology we were learning was doing anything other than inflating our pride.

6. And this is precisely Paul’s concern. It wasn’t so much how these men were affecting one another so much as how they were affecting those who were listening in. He says, their quarreling does NO good “but only ruins the hearers.”

- A. The word for “ruin” here is katastrophe. (that’s actually the GK word here). The literal rendering is “to turn up-side-down.” It’s the same word used in 2 Pet 2:6 where the apostle describes how Sodom and Gomorrah were condemned to extinction.
- B. This is what quarreling about words does to the church. It weakens the church. It dishearten’s God’s people. And it falsely teaches young believers that theology is all about debate and bible study for the sake of knowledge w/o love. God hates what that kind of useless talk does to His church.
- C. Now listen very carefully. I’m not saying pastors shouldn’t confront false doctrine in the church. To the contrary, Paul says that we are to “teach sound doctrine and refute those who contradict.” But Paul

is speaking about the kinds of religious philosophical imaginations that are largely disconnected from the essential doctrines of the church.

7. Generally speaking, this is the kind of sin that is most common among young men. And that may be one of the things Paul has in mind in v. 22 when he commands us to “Flee youthful lusts.” (Wayne Mack, Don’t shout where God whispers).

8. So, if Timothy was going to build a church in Ephesus that endures, he was going to have to dive into the fray with a firehose and douse the flames of petty bickering about things that don’t matter. Second, he would have to...

II. Labor in the Ministry of the Word (15)

Read v. 15

1. The K.J.V. renders the first word here, “Study.” In reality, however, Paul uses a word that means “Give diligence,” “be zealous,” or “work hard.” If you are a pastor (especially the Preaching Pastor) of a church you have hard work to do.

2. Again, this is a solemn charge. Just as Paul said that those engaged in a war of words should be charged before God, so Timothy was to study in such a way that met the approval of God.

On this verse Albert Barnes once wrote:

The object of the ministry is not to please men. Such doctrines should be preached, and such plans formed, such a manner of life pursued, as God will approve. To do this demands... care – for there are many temptations to the opposite course; there are many things the tendency of which is to lead a minister to seek popular favor rather than the divine approval. If any man please God, it will be as the result of deliberate intention and a careful life.”¹

¹ Albert Barnes. www.studyLight.org/commentaries/bnb.html

3. This is the calling of Pastoral ministry. It is NOT to preach and lead in such a way that draws great crowds. It's NOT a call to be especially creative or cool. It's NOT a call to help people feel good about themselves. It is a call to labor over the word of God so that he can deliver the message of the Almighty with clarity and power.

4. To do that requires the mindset of the

- The soldier who doesn't get entangled in civilian affairs.
- The athlete who trains hard and obeys the rules, and
- The hard-working farmer who wants his share of the crops. (2:4-7)

5. His goal is NOT to win the approval of the people but the approval of God. The word for "approved" (dokimazo) means approved by testing. The test of a faithful student of the word is his faithful preaching of the word. And faithful preaching requires hard work. The faithful preacher is a worker who does not need to be ashamed. At the end of his study he is prepared to declare the point of the text as it was intended by the original author. He's ready to announce with confidence, "Thus Saith the Lord!" Not in a flippant or careless way, but in a manner that is backed up by clear explanation that any thinking person can follow in the Text of Scripture as the message is preached.

6. The only question is, "How does he handle the truth?" Not, how clever is he? How culturally relevant is he? But rather, how does he handle the truth? Paul says, he must "rightly handle the word of truth."

7. The KJV renders it, "Rightly dividing the word of truth. And that's a good translation. The word behind "rightly handling" is Ortho-tomaeo. You already know what "ortho" means. It means "to make straight." An ortho-dontist makes your teeth straight. An ortho-pedist makes your bones straight. The word orthotomaeo means "to cut straight."

- A. It could be used of cutting a road through untamed land,
- B. or cutting stone for a building that fit together perfectly.
- C. Perhaps plowing straight furrow across a field.
- D. Or cutting a piece of cloth according to its pattern
- E. Whatever metaphor the writer may have had in mind, "directness" or

“correctness” is clearly the basic concern.²

- F. The faithful minister of the word of God whose concern is to build a church that will endure, labors in the word with the ambition of cutting it straight. Getting the point of the text right, explaining it clearly and practically.
8. And this brings us to the third concern of the pastor who wants to build a church that endures. He not only Confronts Spiritual Trouble-makers; And labors in the ministry of the word... Thirdly,

III. He Shuns Poisonous Rangling (16-18).

Read vv. 16-18

1. Before we dive into this, we should notice Paul’s emphasis on words. First, he told Timothy to warn certain brothers about engaging in a war of words. Now he is concerned about the danger of irreverent words. But in between these two themes he charges Timothy to rightly handle the word. Later in chapter 4 he will command him to Preach the Word.
2. You see, beloved, as far as God is concerned, words matter Why? Because words have power. They influence people for good or for ill. They either draw people toward Christ or lead them away. Perhaps that’s why Jesus himself taught (Matt. 12:36) that, “on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word....”
3. But when you consider that, we see the kindness of God. It is grace to the church of Ephesus that Paul is sending Timothy to warn them about their angry words and irreverent words, for someday they will give an account of every careless word.
4. In verse 16 Paul describes these words as irreverent babble. What is timothy supposed to do with such verbiage? In a word, he is to Avoid them.
 - A. Throughout this passage Paul uses several Active Imperative Verbs. The first is when he commanded Timothy to Remind and Charge certain people about their words.

² Silva, M. (Ed.). (2014). [*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*](#) (Second Edition, Vol. 3, p. 542). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

- B. Second (15) Paul commands Timothy to “Do your best” in the labor of the word.
- C. And now (16) Paul’s command is to Avoid (or shun) poisonous words.

5. The word for “Irreverent Babble” is used two times in the PE in reference to the kind of chatter that is hostile to the truth. In 1 Tim. 6:20 Paul calls this kind of speech “the contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge.”

- A. 1 Tim. 1:4 speaks of people’s fixation “on myths and genealogies.”
- B. 1 Tim. 4:3 speaks of those who wrongly find cause in the bible (or philosophy) to “forbid marriage and require abstinence from certain kinds of food.”
- C. Titus 1:14 people were devoting themselves to Jewish myths and commands of people who turn away from the truth.”
- D. These are a few example of what Paul in his day was calling irreverent babble.

6. Why was he so concerned about these things among believers?

A. Because it Leads to Progressive Ungodliness:

- Read v. 16
- These kinds of discussion and arguments don’t lead people to a deeper love, obedience to the word, or dependent prayer. Rather, they lead to further ungodliness.

B. Because it’s Threatens the Health of the Church

- Read 17
- The word for gangrene in the GK is gangrena. It means, that which eats away. Its like a malignant cancer that kills whatever life is there.
- When this kind of talk is permitted in the church its just a matter of time before the whole body becomes sick.

- And by the way, that's true not only of myths and genealogies, but also of complaining, back-biting, gossip, slander, and habitual discontent.
- Why is Paul so concerned?

C. Because its Leaders Abandon the Gospel

- This isn't theoretical for Paul. He's not guessing about where this kind of talk can lead. He names two former colleagues whom his readers would have known.
- Read 18-19
- And then there is one more reason why Paul is concern about irreverent Babble.

D. Because it's Followers Lose Confidence in Christ.

- It's not just concern for the leaders who might fall away, but for those who are following and watching who may lose their confidence in Christ. "They are upsetting the faith of some."

7. So if a pastor is going to build a church that endures, he must:

I. Confront Spiritual Trouble-makers (14)

II. Labor in the Ministry of the Word (15)

III. Shun Poisonous Rangling (16-18).

And finally:

IV. Rest Upon the Foundation of God (19).

Read v. 19

1. This brings us back to what we have studied over the past few weeks. For the sake of time let me just tell you that the firm foundation here is God's church.

2. The church here is a little like the "Sand Pallas" I described to you in the beginning. The church was designed by Christ to withstand the fiercest storms and crushing assaults of the wicked. And Jesus promised that it would stand. It will endure. He said, "I will build my church and [not even] the gates of Hades (death) will not overpower it.

3. So when there seems to be little fruit and the enemies of the cross seem strong at the same time you are feeling oh so weak, just climb up on the great foundation stone and rest. God has it all under control.

4. In ancient times whenever a foundation stone was laid, the master builder would carve an inscription into the stone. In this case, God has carved two inscriptions (Two Doctrines) into the stone upon which we rest; namely.

- #1 “The Lord know who are his.”
 - Do you remember our discussion on election in v. 10?
 - No matter what happens in this life, God has chosen a host too vast to number who will come to Jesus no matter how fierce the storm. The Father has already given them to the Son, and they are his.
 - We just get the privilege of taking the gospel to them by which God creates faith in their hearts to receive the grace God offers.
- #2 “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.”
 - Do you remember our previous discussion on The Doctrine of Perseverance? We learned that all who come to Christ have died and been raised with Christ. Therefore, they are no longer slaves to sin.

5. So what kind of rest do we enjoy as we stand upon Christ’s promise of the church? It is this, that God knows who are his, and that we know who are his by the holiness he is working in them. (1 Cor. 15, Your labor is not in vain in the Lord)

6. When I as your primary preaching pastor get discouraged in the ministry, Paul says to me, look around! Do you see how these people have changed? Have you heard the testimonies of how Christ is working in their hearts, conforming them to the image of Christ? That’s God’s work. And He is accomplishing it by the faithful ministry of the word.

As Christians are called to persevere, so churches are called to faithfully endure. Paul shows us how.