

The Aim of Scripture

Why Did God Give Us His Word?

2 Timothy 3:10 You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness,

¹¹ my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra-- which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.

¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it

¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

(2 Tim 3:10-17)

Convinced by Scripture Alone

“Historians have described it as the trial that led to the birth of the modern world.”¹ Five centuries ago last year, “The past and the future were met,”² when a single Augustinian monk was put on trial for heresy before the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire himself. After stirring up a controversy in a small German town for the contents of nearly five-score points he nailed to the church door, attacking the “incompetence, flippancy, immorality”³ of the clergy, and some of the dangerous and heretical teachings and practices of the Church, he began to write books like *The Babylonian Captivity* and *The Papacy in Rome*, which got the attention of the Holy See.

At one point, Pope Leo X was so infuriated, he wrote a papal bull warning monk that he must recant of 41 of the 95 points, and then compared him to “a fox seeking to destroy Christ’s vineyard,” and “A wild boar from the forest seeking to destroy,” Mother Church. Three months later, and a day

¹ Douglas O. Linder, “The Trial of Martin Luther: An Account,” *Famous Trials*, <https://www.famous-trials.com/luther/286-home#:~:text=Luther%20had%20been%20found%20guilty,up%20and%20trampled%20on%20it>.

² Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), 181.

³ Douglas O. Linder, “The Trial of Martin Luther: A Chronology,” *Famous Trials*, <https://www.famous-trials.com/luther/288-chronology>.

after receiving the bull, the monk wrote back, “This bull condemns Christ himself” and I am now “certain the pope is the Antichrist,” adding, “It is better that I should die a thousand times than that I should retract one syllable of the condemned articles. And as they excommunicated me for the sacrilege of heresy, so I excommunicate them in the name of the sacred truth of God. Christ will judge whose excommunication will stand.”

The battle was on. The Diet [Court] of Worms was called. And a lowly and perhaps not a little crazy Brother, Martin Luther, now saw himself standing toe to toe with the most powerful and in some cases sinister people in the world, while he stood in the dock, on trial for his life. He had to defend his [preaching](#). He had to defend his [prose](#). Actually, he didn't have to defend them. He had to repent and publicly retract them or face dire consequences.

At one point, after a long verbal duel with The Archbishop of Trier, a man named John Eck, who was trying the case, Luther uttered those now famous words.

Unless I am convinced by [Scripture](#) and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the [Word of God](#). I cannot and I

will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.

In this way, the **Scripture**, God's Holy Word, became the **formal cause** of the Reformation, a movement that ushered in such massive change that it truly led to the birth of the modern world. Nothing in the world has been the same since. We sit here today in a non-Roman Catholic church, worshiping God according to our consciences, because of this trial. We do so in a nation founded upon certain principles governing freedom of the church from the state because of this trial. Everything about our modern lives has in one way or another been touched by this trial.

But let me return to this *cause* of the Reformation. A **formal cause** is the **blueprint** or **sketch** that is used to create a structure or sculpture or whatever. In this case, the Reformation was the thing being built by dozens of Reformers around Europe, and Scripture Alone, as it is called in Latin—*sola scriptura*, was the blueprint. Everything they did came from the Scripture, and they would argue, the Scripture alone. **Not from general revelation** be that in the form of **traditions**, the **conscience**, **common sense**, **reason**, or **experiences** like **mystical insights**, **angelic visitations**, or

charismatic sign-gifts. But from special revelation, God's holy written word preserved for thousands of years, directly inspired by the Holy Spirit of God himself, the Living and Active Word that gives us all we need for faith and holy living. It wasn't that they viewed these other things as evil, nor that they never used some of them. Of course they did. But they were held as secondary to the Scripture. Always below it, always under its authoritative instruction. Always subject to its correction, teaching, and reproof. Even putting them as equal with Scripture would mean to really put the Scripture under those other things, and this could not be, if they really wanted to change the world with the one thing with the power to do it: The Gospel of Jesus Christ.

2 Timothy 3:10-17—Structure and Context

The second half of 2 Timothy 3 changes subjects from the horrible ways people will act and behave in the “last days,” to the way God's people and pastors are to act and behave instead. In this way, it is both a new subject and a continuation of what came before. Since it is related, allow me to remind you of that list of nearly 20 adjectives that describe those who subversively infiltrate Christ's churches:

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.”

(2Tim 3:1-5)

This **list** is now to be contrasted with a **new one** which begins in **vs. 10**. The verse begins, “**You...**” The target of its arrows is the heart of the pastor of Ephesus—Timothy. Those arrows are *not adjectives* that describe heretics, *but nouns* that characterize the **godly teacher** himself—the Apostle Paul. Seven nouns in **vs. 10** are governed by a single pronoun “**my**,” and the ESV rightly brings out the meaning by translating it with seven “mys.” All of them are singular in form. **Vs. 11** adds two more nouns, both of which become plural, giving us a total of nine traits. These traits are not commanded by Paul for Timothy to follow, because Timothy he is *already following them*. The verb is indicative, not imperative. “**You ... have followed my ...**” And this is in

contradistinction to the other list that, thankfully, he has not followed.

The list itself moves from *theology* (my teaching), to *ethics* (my conduct), to *motivation* (my aim in life), to *Christian character* (my faith, patience, love, steadfastness) (all in vs. 10), with the last two items exploring the crucial experience of *suffering* (vs. 11). These last two lead to a restatement of *the old paradox* that goes back to Job and the Psalms that godliness leads to suffering, while evil continues to advance and flourish (12-13).⁴ In vs. 14, Paul *returns to theology* thus creating a very loose chiasmic structure that centers on *the Lord rescuing him, a theme that he will return to* in 4:18:

- A. “You ... have followed my teaching...” (10)
- B. “My persecutions...” (11)
- C. “**The Lord rescued me**” (11b)
- B’. “All who desire to live a godly life ... will be persecuted” (12-13)
- A’. “Continue in what you have learned” (14)

As this structure comes to an end, it brings about *a second transition* in the chapter. If the first gave us the contrasting list of godly vs. wicked people, the second gives us *another list*, this time focusing on the content and origin of where

⁴ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 570.

Paul and Timothy both learned these godly virtues. Ultimately, that origin is described with two terms, “**The sacred writings**,” which he says make you wise for salvation. The second is “**Scripture**” which he gives a new list of six attributes that it contributes to help us in our salvation. By my count, there were nineteen things listed in **vv. 1-5** and there are nineteen things told to **Timothy in 10-17**:

2Tim 3:1-5

lovers of themselves

lovers of money

Boasters

proud

blasphemers

disobedient to

parents

Unthankful

Unholy

Unloving

Unforgiving

Slanderers

Without self-control

brutal

despisers of good

Traitors

Headstrong

Haughty

Lovers of pleasure

rather than lovers of

God

2Tim 3:10-17

Followed my teaching

My conduct

My aim in life

My faith

My patience

My love

My steadfastness

My persecutions

My sufferings

Continue in what you have learned

And have firmly believed

Knowing from whom you learned it

Sacred writings make you wise for salvation through faith in

Christ

All Scripture is profitable for teaching

For reproof

For correction

For Training in righteousness

That the man of God may be complete

Equipped for every good work

As we move forward in our passage, I want to begin at the end, with the **Scripture**, the place I started with in our story of Martin Luther. For it is the Scripture and its list which explains all the traits the godly person is to possess in the earlier list. You must understand why Scripture is the foundation and bedrock of all we believe, teach, and practice. If you do not, you will enter into a thousand errors that will each lead you to a dead end spiritually in this life and in the life to come.

Sola Scripture: Its Source

Many books and articles have been written about *sola scriptura*. Many lectures and sermons have proclaimed it. Many podcasts and documentaries have been created promoting and explaining it. Something I'm always struck by is how rarely the doctrine is begun to be discussed using the Scripture itself. This is both ironic and self-defeating. If this really is a truth derived from the Bible and if it really is so powerful a truth that it could change the world, then we owe it to ourselves and others to demonstrate it first from Scripture itself. This is precisely what **vv. 14-17** in our passage today does.

In vs. 10, the Apostle's list begins, "You, however, have followed my teaching..." Vs. 14 then reiterates it. "But as for you, continue in what you have learned." The verse goes on to tell us that what Timothy has learned, he has also believed. This is the classic distinction in discussions of faith between mere head knowledge and personal trust that what that knowledge tells you is actually true and is capable of doing exactly what it says.

Thus, it is not enough to merely learn a thing. Some people are ever learning but never perceiving. In fact, this is precisely what the heretics earlier in the chapter were said to do. They are "always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth" (2Tim 3:7). To sit in church week after week, continually hearing the good news, but never internalizing it, is the definition of the wicked person in the first half of the chapter. It leads to all manner of trouble and evil in a person's life down the road, because at its heart it is a denial of the truth and calling God a liar. If God tells you to repent and believe and you refuse, what else can we call it?

But Timothy is not like this. He has not only learned but has "firmly believed" what he learned. Yet, his faith is not misplaced, nor is it some leap in the dark, some irrational

jump that is rooted in nothing but wishful thinking. How do we know? The Apostle gives “four reasons” that his faith is not misplaced. “First, because of the teacher from whom he learned; second, the time when he learned it; third, the source from which the teaching came; and finally, the sublime purpose for which he learned it” (Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on 2 Timothy*).⁵

First, he “knows from whom he learned it” (14). This refers to the Apostle Paul, who taught it to him. But why should this be an evidence of faith? Because “Timothy ... was aware [and] knew that his fidelity and his calling had been proved” (Calvin, *Commentary on 2Tim 3:14*), both to himself and to the very Disciples of Jesus Christ who watched him and sent him to plant churches, after his radical change from murdering Christians to not caring if he himself is murdered in order to tell other people about Jesus so that they might become Christians. Therefore, the personal source of the teaching is giving to Timothy as “commending the certainty of the doctrine.” Paul is no liar, no heretic, no private gossip, no subversive

⁵ Peter Gorday, *Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture NT 9. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 268.

infiltrator, but a publicly approved workman sent out by Peter, James, and John.⁶

Second, **he knows when he learned it**. Timothy is one of the fortunate ones, in the NT era or any time after. He was taught the faith “**from childhood**.” The word is *brephos*, translated into the Latin as *infantia*—**infancy**. His mother Eunice and grandmother Lois (**2Tim 1:5**) have raised him up in these truths. In other words, when the Apostle first came to **Lystra**, where Timothy was from (**Acts 16:1**), and he heard particularly about how Christians are to behave and what they are to believe, this was no new doctrine to him, even though it was the first time a formal missionary had

⁶ Calvin’s comments on this are really good. “This is said for the purpose of commending the certainty of the doctrine; for, if any one has been wrong instructed, he ought not to persevere in it. On the contrary, we ought to unlearn all that we have learned apart from Christ, if we wish to be his disciples; as, for example, it is the commencement of our pure instruction in the faith, to reject and forget all the instruction of Popery. The Apostle therefore does not enjoin Timothy to defend indiscriminately the doctrine which has been delivered to him, but only that which he knows to be truth; by which he means, that he must make a selection. Besides, he does not claim this as a private individual, that what he has taught shall be reckoned to be a divine revelation; but he boldly asserts his own authority to Timothy, who, he was aware, knew that his fidelity and his calling had been proved. And if he was fully convinced that he had been taught by an Apostle of Christ, he concluded that therefore it was not a doctrine of man, but of Christ.

This passage teaches us, that we ought to be as careful to guard against obstinacy in matters that are uncertain, (such as all the doctrines of men are,) as to hold with unshaken firmness the truth of God. Besides, we learn from it, that faith ought to be accompanied by prudence, that it may distinguish between the word of God and the word of men, so that we may not adopt at random everything that is brought forward. Nothing is more inconsistent with the nature of faith than light credulity, which allows us to embrace everything indiscriminately, whatever it may be, and from whomsoever it proceeds; because it is the chief foundation of faith, to know that it has God for its author.” **John Calvin** and William Pringle, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 246–247.

ever preached in that city. The Jews have always had these things, even if some of them, such as the specifics about the coming Messiah were obscure and hidden.

That leads most naturally to the **third** point. Timothy knows *the source*. It wasn't Paul. It wasn't his mother. It wasn't his grandmother. Rather, he was acquainted with “the sacred writings” (*hiera grammata*; **2Tim 3:15**) and the “Scripture” (*graphē*; **16**). These are synonymous. “Holy Writings” was used by Paul (cf. **Rom 1:2⁷**), **Philo**, and **Josephus** to refer technically to the Jewish Scriptures or some part of them.⁸ “Scriptures” is used many times in the NT, also defining the OT Scriptures, *but* Peter uses it to refer to *the writings of Paul* and others who are writing the *New Testament* (**2Pet 3:16**).⁹ This, then, is the “*scriptura*” part of the phrase. What about the *sola*?

This comes from the **fourth** proof Paul gives for why Timothy's faith is firm and solid. Theodore of Mopsuestia

⁷ Here, Paul uses “holy” but not “writings;” rather he uses “scriptures.”

⁸ **Philo**, *Life of Moses* 2.290, 292; *Legation to Gaius* 195; **Josephus**, *Antiquities* 1.13; 10.210.⁸

⁹ *The Dutch Annotations* spell this out well. “All Scripture,’ that is, the whole Scripture, as this word ‘all’ is taken whereby are principally understood the writings of the Old Testament, of which the writings of the New Testament are a further explication and which therefore are also comprehended under it, as may of them as were then written; as Paul wrote this epistle a little before his death, which must also in like manner be understood of the rest which then were not yet written. Scripture is of divine inspiration, that is, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who is a Spirit of truth, and led the writers of these writings into all truth, that they could not err.” **Lee Gatiss**, Bradley G. Green, and Timothy George, eds., *1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon: New Testament*, vol. XII, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2019), 250.

called it “the sublime purpose for which he learned it.” That purpose is summarized after the “sacred writings.” “... which are able to make (*dunamena*) you wise (*sophisai*) for salvation (*sōtērian*) through faith in Christ Jesus” (2Tim 3:15). This refers to the Gospel. The Gospel is the power (*dunamis*) of God for the salvation (*sōtērian*) of everyone who believes (Rom 1:15). We learn it from the Scripture. If the Scripture is able, by itself, of its own content and power, to make one wise for salvation, then *nothing else is needed* to make one wise for salvation, for it is able. It is able because there is a power of God that works to save a person through/by faith in the Person of Jesus Christ. We’ve learned much about this faith throughout our tour of the letters of Timothy, but it is worth hearing once more, the center of the first letter. “He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory” (1Tim 3:16). These things we believe, because they are true, because the Scripture teaches us about them.

The next verse explores this *more fully*. It says this refers to “*all Scripture*” (2Tim 3:16). Yes, Scripture has different parts and talks about different things, but all of it is what is in mind. Not some of it. The whole.

All Scripture “is breathed out by God.” Some translations say, “inspired by God.” The Bible is the only book in the world that is like this. But this word can be easily misunderstood. I like “inspiring” music, inspiring mountains, and inspiring movies. That doesn’t get at what Paul is saying. He isn’t saying merely that the Bible can move you emotionally, though it certainly can do that.

The word is a compound word—*theo-pneustos* or literally **God-Breathed**. But “breathed” (*pneo*) is related to the word for **Spirit** (*pneuma*), which is often translated as breath (cf. **2Th 2:8**; **Rev 13:15**, etc.). And what did Jesus say about the Spirit? He is the Spirit of *Life* or in OT terms, *the Breath of Life* (**Gen 2:7**; cf. **John 20:22**). To put it another way, Paul is saying that all Scripture is alive, because all Scripture has God as its Speaker and Breather. Therefore, it alone is needed to have life.

Calvin rightly says something we should all heed here. This,

... is a very high commendation of the Holy Scriptures, that we must not seek anywhere else the wisdom which is sufficient for salvation ... it is *divinely inspired* ... so, it is beyond all controversy that men ought to receive it with reverence. This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. Whoever then wishes

to profit in the Scriptures, let him, first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the Law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit.

But this Divine inspiration is not an end to itself. Rather, because of it, it is “profitable” (2Tim 3:16). We’ve seen through both of these letters how the heretics use the Scripture to make *a profit*. This is not what the Apostle is talking about. He is not saying that the Scripture is given so that we can feed our “love of money.” We are not talking about becoming physical rich, but *spiritually* rich. It provides very specific things for which it is profitable.

It is also able to teach you; that is to educate you. It is able to reprove you; that is tell you that you are wrong. It is able to correct you; that is not only tell you that you are wrong but actually change you through it. It is able to train you; that is make you grow stronger. In what? In *righteousness*. Chrysostom summarized these four things saying, “By Scripture we may disprove what is false, be corrected, be brought to a right understanding, and be comforted and consoled” (Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Timothy* 9). This then tells us what God gave the Scripture for. It is not given as a manual to all things in life. It is not a cookbook, a playbook, a car manual, a physics textbook, a personal spell book.

Rather, it gives us everything we need “for faith and life” (LBC 1.2).

As such, we need *nothing but the Scripture alone for these things*. Everything we need *to be saved* and everything we need to *live lives pleasing to God* is found in the Scripture. If it is found in the Scripture, then we do not need anything else for these purposes. That doesn't mean we shouldn't seek confirmation from *tradition*. If this has always been so, then of course we will find church history full of agreement on these points. That doesn't mean we should be surprised if personal *experience* matches up. If this has always been so, then of course our personal experiences will line up with it. This doesn't mean we shouldn't seek confirmation in *reason* as we learn to think better about these things. Of course, God gives us minds to use to think well about his word. But none of these things trump Scripture in regard to how we are saved or how God wants us to live our lives. If they do, then the Scripture is really not sufficient, really doesn't tell us all we need to be saved and to live lives pleasing to God. So why bother with it at all? Why? Because Scripture *is* sufficient to tell us all we need to know about them.

But Paul is not finished. Teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness lead to this end. “*That the*

man of God may be complete” (17). If he becomes completed through the Scripture in these ways, then nothing else is needed. Anything that comes along and contradicts the Scripture, in fact destroys this power of God and leads not to completion but to **deficiency**. In what? He says, “**Equipped for every good work.**” **Good works then are the goal** or aim that God gives us the Scripture to work in us that salvation which is by faith alone, but not by a faith that *is* alone. For faith and works go hand in hand. “**If someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?**” (Jas 2:14). No. The faith God grants to believe in his Son through the Gospel is a faith that also unites a person to the same Son of God by the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Living Scripture. And anyone who is united to this Son of God **must produce fruit**. That isn’t a command. It is a statement of fact. This then takes us back to **vs. 10** and the idea that Timothy is given a list of traits that he has already followed, because he is a Christian. Timothy knows about them because of the four things we’ve seen. But now we need to turn to those in order to see what exactly it means in this context that we produce good works.

Sola Scripture: Its Purpose

What are good these works? In our context, they are the theology, ethics, motivation, and character that exemplify godly people, especially as they are caused to pass through the fires of suffering. These are the things we find the Apostle discussing in vv. 10-13. Let's look at the list.

Many people will not think of theology as a “good work,” and yet, why not? Clearly, it is one of the things that is summed listed here, not once, but twice. And what is theology if not the learning to think rightly about God? But thinking rightly about God takes work. Thinking rightly about God would be a good thing. Therefore, theology is a good work that each Christian must learn to do better and better.

Here, theology is summarized by the bookends of our structure: “my teaching” (3:10) and “what you have learned” (14). That the teaching is *theological*, is clear from the fact that it “saves” you. That teaching and learning must be compromised of the Gospel, which alone is the power of God to save. Thus, we remember back in 1:10 that the Apostle came proclaiming “that which has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who

abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” We’ve seen already how this was summarized in the center of the first letter as all the events that surrounded the coming, work, death, resurrection, ascension, and return of Jesus (1Tim 3:16). Timothy has followed this, the opposite of the false teachers and heretics.

Back in 1Tim 1:9-10, Paul’s teachings are said to be of a different nature. There, they are called “the law,” and he gives a list of words that summarize the Ten Commandments, which are obviously still applicable today according to the Apostle. This takes us to the second in our list, which moves nicely from Paul’s teaching to his “conduct.” This is his ethical behavior. How does he act around other people? How does he act in the church? What kinds of virtues is he consumed with displaying to others? Timothy could know simply by looking at Paul’s conduct.

We’ll see more specifically what those are in a moment. But it is worth seeing how 1 Clement used this same word a couple of times in his ancient letter. Writing from Rome to the church at Corinth around 95 AD he said, “It is disgraceful, dear friends, yes, utterly disgraceful and unworthy of your conduct in Christ, that it should be reported that the well-established and ancient church of the

Corinthians, because of one or two persons, is rebelling against its presbyters” (1Clem 47:6), and “Let us therefore root this out quickly, and let us fall down before the Master and pray to him with tears, that he may be merciful and be reconciled to us, and restore us to the honorable and pure *conduct* which characterizes our love for the brotherhood” (48:1).¹⁰ Clearly, conduct is something that is to be characterized by love for the church and one another. This is a love that expresses itself not in rebellion, but mercy and prayer and humility and reconciliation.

Paul now turns to his “*aim in life*” (2Tim 3:10). This is one word in Greek, the same word used in 1:9 that tells us about God’s planning to give the gift of salvation. Here, it “expresses the ideas of commitment and firm resolve to carry out what he felt called to do. And in his case, and in this context, that involves executing his mission to the Gentile world.”¹¹ Of course, Paul is talking to Timothy, a man of God who has a similar aim in life as a minister of the Gospel. As such, their aim in life is very specifically the same. But all Christians share in the same general aim in life, to please God with our lives and the individual callings that he

¹⁰ Michael William Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, Updated ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 83.

¹¹ Towner, 571.

gives to each one of us. The point is, **life has a purpose**, an aim, just like we've seen the Scripture have. That purpose is to glorify God and enjoy him forever, glorying him with our work, with our money, with our time, with our spare time, with all that we do with our lives. This glorifying of God is the opposite of the self-love that was expressed in so many ways in the list that defined the heretics. This purpose complements that of the Scripture as we have already seen.

Paul's aim in life can itself be *a moral issue*, if it includes how he conducts himself. But conduct is specifically seen as moral behavior that expresses itself in the next four words. The first is "*my faith*." While this could refer to his faithfulness, it is more likely that this describes the **vertical dimension** of his life that exists between himself and his God through faith in Christ. His relationship to God through **faith** becomes the bedrock of the next three virtues.

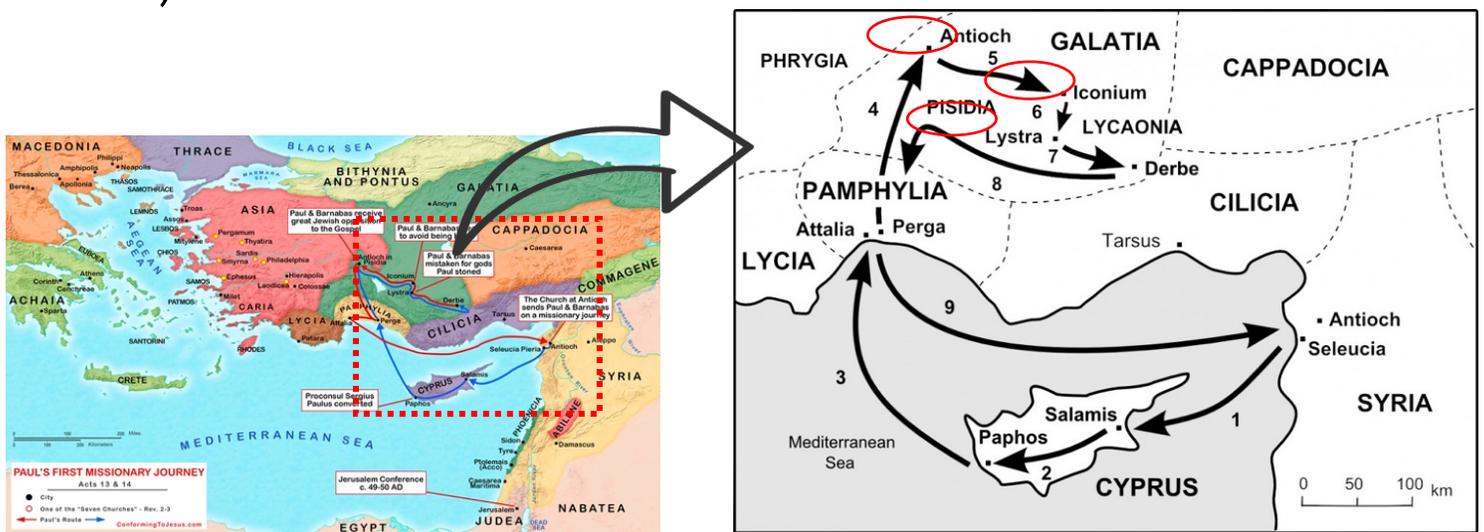
"*My patience*." **Patience** is the fourth fruit of the Spirit (**Gal 5:22**) and the first attribute of love (**1Cor 13:4**). Patience is extremely difficult to display ... *when the last thing you want to do is be patient!* This is the virtue of waiting on God and persevering in the face of opposition. That opposition can be from an enemy, like those Timothy is facing in the church, or from a friend or love whom you are having

difficulty with at the present time. It's opposite is the hot-head we saw in the vice list.

In either case, it only truly comes through “*love*,” which is the next in Paul's list. This *love* is not love of self (as in the list of vices), but its opposite, love of neighbor and of God. *Patience without love* is bare tolerance. It endures simply because it must. *Patience with love* has as its end goal the best for the relationship and trusts that God is working even when it doesn't feel like it. This is because *love (agape) is not a feeling*, but a virtue, an action, a thing that is acted out. Love endures all things. Because love believes all things that God has said. Therefore, love hopes all things will work out for the good of those who love God and have been called according to his purpose. This *never ends*, because we live in a world where love is constantly needed and it is given to us by a God who is infinite Love.

Perhaps all of this is why the last of the seven in **vs. 10** is “*steadfastness*.” Another word for it is *endurance*. This virtue is especially displayed through suffering. In Romans, Paul says, “*Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope*” (**Rom 5:3-4**).

Suffering is exactly where he goes in the final two words in this list of virtues. He talks about “my persecutions and sufferings” (2Tim 3:11). Suffering is a general term; persecution is a term that gets at specific types of suffering. He gets very specific. He recalls three examples “that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra...” This refers to his First Missionary Journey, where he met Timothy in the last of these three cities. In fact, these were the fourth, fifth, and sixth stops on his journey (see map below).



All three are discussed by Luke in the book of Acts. Antioch does not refer to Antioch of Syria. That is where he set out from. Rather, it refers to Pisidian Antioch in Western Turkey, near the other two cities, about 215 miles east of Ephesus (which he would not go to until the 2nd journey).

After preaching to the citizens of this Roman colony, “the Jews” turned influential “women of high standing” and “the leading men of the city” against Paul and Barnabas with unnamed persecution which “drove them out of their district” (Acts 13:14-52). We are given no more specifics.

Some 75 miles as the bird flies to the southeast lay Iconium, the next stop on the missionary journey. Here, the Apostles met initially with great success and many Jews and Gentiles believed in Christ. But again, the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and “poisoned their minds against the brothers.” At some point, “an attempt was made by both groups with their rulers “to mistreat them and to stone them.” They learned of the plot and fled to Lystra (14:1-7).

Lystra sits just 20 miles southwest of Iconium. It is where Paul met Timothy, and so this is surely why he is reminding the young pastor of these things now. Timothy was there as an adolescent, when these things happened. Luke tells us that Paul and Barnabas were doing great miracles in Lystra, such that the people actually mistook them for Zeus and Hermes! But the Jews from the other two cities heard what was going on, and they came down and persuaded the crowds who finally did the deed. They stoned

Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead (14:8-20).

Paul says that he “endured” all these persecutions, and yet from them all, the Lord rescued him (2Tim 3:11). Timothy, who knew full well about them, and perhaps even saw the last one take place with his own eyes, is now following Paul in all these things, including suffering and persecutions of his own, in Ephesus, where these radical infiltrator heretics are poised to destroy the church.

This leads Paul to contemplate, however briefly, one of the great paradoxes of this age. Where is God when bad things happen? Why do the righteous suffer, while the wicked prosper? This is called theodicy, the problem of evil. Paul does not wax on about it, trying to explain it all from a philosophical point of view. I imagine that at this moment, as he is simply remembering these incredible trials, and that he is thinking of his own Lord—the Lord Jesus, whose suffering and persecution make all others pale in comparison.

Thus, the great Apostle seems to stop for a moment. He gets very serious with the young man, whom he loves as his own son. Timothy, “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (12). It is said as a simple

matter of fact. Godliness brings persecution. Job knew it. Joseph knew it. Jonah, Jeremiah, and all the prophets knew it (see **Matt 23:34**). Jesus knew it. He told his disciples, “You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved” (**Matt 10:22**). Again, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (**16:24**). Again, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciples. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple” (**Luke 14:26-27**). Again, “If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (**John 15:19**). Again, “The hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God” (**16:2**).

One of the great problems of today’s church age is that we are not preaching this most basic doctrine of the New Testament. We are not carrying out this good work as Paul did. Rather than telling people that if they follow this Savior they will have their best life now, we need to be telling them that they absolutely do not want to follow him if they want

their best life now. Stay away from Jesus is that's what you want. Stay *far* away from him. But if you want your best life *in the world to come*, if you long for heaven, for eternal life, for endless peace and joy, for sadness to be dispelled, for sin to be taken away, then hear the truth. He will give you eternal life, if you are willing to endure with him through the **fiery crucible of suffering**.

Know that even as this is true, so also is the corollary. Even as you may be persecuted, “**evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived**.” That's the way of it here and now. Those who make up the list of vices in the first part of the chapter **have their reward now**. And they deceive many people in the church to follow after them in their apostacy. But as men or women of God, you must be known as those with the virtues of faith, patience, love, and steadfastness in the face of sufferings and persecutions.

You know that these things are true, because the **Scripture itself testifies** to you that they are. You know that it is true because the **Holy Spirit said so**, and he witnesses to you that these things are true. You know that these things are true because **salvation comes to you** through it and because God does not leave you by yourself, but teaches,

reproves, corrects, and trains you so that you may be complete, equipped for every good work.

If there is a structure at all in this section of 2 Timothy, as I have said, it is in **vv. 10-14** and that structure has as its center, **enduring and the Lord rescuing**. Without giving too much away, Paul returns to this theme near the end of the letter, where he knows full well that the Lord may not rescue him from the death he is probably going to have to endure at the hands of Caesar. But he knows the Lord will rescue him **“from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom”** (**2Tim 4:18**).

Still, the Lord has rescued him from very dangerous persecutions already, and perhaps he will let him leave Rome a free man. He doesn't know. But it is interesting to think about how this focus on **the Lord's Rescuing him is itself a proof** that the Word of God is true, and that Scripture Alone really must be the foundation for any and all reforms the church can have.

When he says, **“which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me,”** he is echoing a couple of Psalms. **Psalm 33:18 LXX** says, **“The righteous ones cried out and the Lord heard them and delivered them from all their afflictions.”** **Psalm 33:20** continues, **“Many are the**

afflictions of the righteous, and yet he will rescue them from them all” (cf. Ps 33:5; 141:7).¹² Do you see how this statement from Paul is actually a proof to trust Scripture? God has done this very thing in the past for his saints. Now he does it for Paul. He will do it for Timothy. He will do it for you. As we will see, at the end of the letter, that may be spiritual deliverance, rather than physical. But it is still deliverance, and even better, eternal deliverance.

And who is doing this delivering? In the Psalm it is **Yahweh**. For Paul, it is **Kurios**. Kurios for Paul is almost always **Jesus**. Often, Yahweh for the Psalmist is also the Son of God. Same person. Jesus is always our deliverer. That’s what he came to do. We know it from the Scripture and we know that the Scripture is given to make us people who will increasingly display good works when we believe in him. Those good works may take us to places in this world we do not want to do. But what is our aim at the end of the day? Is it not eternal life in the life to come with our Lord and Deliverer?

Trust then in his word. It is sure and true and will not let you down. That means you want to know more of what it says. Hear the wisdom of **John of Damascus** on this. “**To**

¹² See the discussion in Towner, *Letters*, 575. Or Towner, 1-2 Timothy, CONTUOT, 907-08.

search the sacred Scripture is very good and most profitable for the soul. For, “like a tree which is planted near the running waters,” so does the soul watered by sacred Scripture also grow hearty and bear fruit in due season. This is the orthodox faith. It is adorned with its evergreen leaves, with actions pleasing to God” (John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith* 4.17).

Everything you need for salvation and a life pleasing to God is found in the sacred writings and the holy Scripture. May God’s Spirit who inspired it, breathe out upon you his life-transforming power to conform you not to the image of the godless and the heretics, but to the Perfect Lord, into whose image we are all being made to conform.

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