Continue in what you have learned

2 Tim 3

KV 14,15

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Paul’s direction for Timothy in this passage is to continue in what he has learned. This means that Timothy needs to continually put into practice what he learned from Paul and from the bible. Continuing is a big issue. I’m sure that every person in this room tried to do something consistently they wanted to do and that was really important, but eventually stopped. One time I tried to continue in playing ping pong. I needed to exercise and I love ping pong so I started going to a ping pong club once a week. Guess how long I went? 2 weeks. Obviously you can’t compare playing ping pong to the Christian life, where there’s eternal life, and eternal glory. But surprisingly the Christian life is very similar to this, that is not continuing. Maybe someone’s starts out really fired up for God, and they do it for a little while, but eventually, the emotion and they hype wear off, and almost everyone stops for whatever reason. Why do most people not continue in what they’ve learned? and how can we continue despite persecution, temptation, and anything else that comes our way? Paul answers these questions in this passage.

Let’s pray

Part 1 why we don’t continue

Let’s begin by reading verses 1-4 responsively, let’s go, “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”

Paul writes this to Timothy to describe the last days and the problems the world will have. The word love is the most repeated word in verses 2-5, it’s repeated 6 times. So this shows that the biggest problem in the last days will be a love problem. The passage describes such people as lovers of themselves, money, and pleasure. I’ve heard questions like, what’s wrong with loving these things? Isn’t pleasure good? Isn’t money useful? And shouldn’t I love myself? But I think that’s the wrong question because the passage doesn’t use the word love. What word does the passage use? It uses the word “lover.” So the question should be what’s wrong with being a lover of these things? This shows us one reason why most people don’t continue in what they’ve learned. The word lover is a very intimate and personal word, usually associated between a man and woman. It shows your dedication and your commitment to what you are a lover of. So in the context of this passage the level of love between a person, and money, pleasure, and themselves, is so involved that a person doesn’t care about anything else. One reason people don’t continue in what they’ve learned, is because they are lovers of things besides God.

Paul goes on and uses so many other terms: boastful, proud, abusive, and it goes on and on. But what Paul says in verse 5, is even more surprising. Let’s read this verse together, let’s go, ” 5having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.” What could Paul be talking about here? How can you have a form of godliness but deny it’s power? He also warns Timothy to not have anything to do with them. We’ll come back to this in just a moment because after this he describes the people even more, so let’s read verses 6-7 together, let’s go, “6They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, 7always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.” Paul says that these people will pretend to be Christian, pretend to be Godly to take advantage of others, even those who are weak, and are burdened with their own sins and evil desires. Then in verse 7, Paul reveals another reason why people don’t’ continue in what they’ve learned, “always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.” They are always learning, in fact they never stop learning. Can you imagine someone is always learning something but never able to accept it? It sounds really sad and exhausting.  What’s it like, to be always learning, but never being able to acknowledge the truth? If you don’t acknowledge the truth, you don’t have to submit to it, and you can live a lie. So it’s ok to be lovers of pleasure, money, and yourself. This ties really well in with verse 5, because you can have a form of godliness, you can look spiritual, but you don’t have to change on the inside. Such a person doesn’t know the power of a godly life, which is really sad. This is also very poisonous, because someone like this can lead God’s people astray. And if you imitate them without knowing the power of a Godly life you’ll end up just like them. That’s exactly what Paul is warning Timothy about, saying that he should have nothing to do with them. They sound good and reasonable in the beginning, but it’s a lie. We need to watch ourselves from people like this, even people in our own church. Some examples of this are people who only want to learn theology and debate but never apply the teachings to themselves. Or someone who goes to church and has bible study, but never repents. In Ubf, what is every member encouraged to have? Consistent bible studies, usually its once a week, but sometimes even daily. But with all this bible knowledge, are we acknowledging the truth? Are we repenting? And are we in fact, Godly?

Paul gives us two examples as well. Jannes and Jambres were the chief magicians in pharaoh’s court in the book of exodus. They tried to deny the power of God, through Moses, by attempting to copy God’s power by making magic of their own, but it was just cheap tricks. They matched Moses for a while but their magic ran out and their folly was clear to everyone. They could not stand against Moses any more (Ex 9:11). What truth did they oppose? That God’s power is sovereign and could not be matched. So they did not oppose Moses but God. Paul says that just as these men Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so do the men Paul’s talking about, oppose the truth. And Paul continues saying these men are rejected. God is rejecting them. And what they are doing, whether it is in secret or not, will be made known to God and to each of us.

Actually, if you just look at church history, people’s sins come out, and they leave, and their folly is made clear to everyone. But what about Paul? Was his folly ever made clear to everyone? No, because he lived a Godly life. There was no folly and there was no selfishness in his heart. Let’s look at his life. Compared to the lives of the people in the last days, Paul’s life really stands out.

Part 2 Paul continued

Let’s read verses 10-11 together, let’s go, “10You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, 11persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.

Paul’s life shows us what a Christian life is like. Actually Paul doesn’t use the word Christian, he uses the phrase “Godly life.” So this isn’t some religion or idea. In a Godly life, there is purpose, faith, love, and patience. But because we are like this, the world hates us, so there is also persecution, endurance, and suffering. Paul describes three places where he was persecuted. One that stands out was in lystra, where Paul was stoned so badly that everyone thought he was dead, but when he woke up, he went right back into the city to preach. Paul accredits this victory to God.

Then Paul says something very hard to hear in verses 12 and 13, let’s read these verses together, let’s go, “12In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” If we want to live a Godly life, we will be persecuted. I can imagine timothy reading this with a heavy heart because of his sin. As mentioned before by Allan timothy’s problem was that he didn’t like to suffer. But Paul is writing this to him, saying outright what timothy doesn’t want to hear. And Paul doesn’t sugar coat it either. He even says that it’s going to get worse as people get worse.  Know that as we deny ourselves to come to God, and as we do our best to present ourselves as one approved, and as we join in suffering for the gospel, there is going to be even more suffering as we are persecuted. Paul didn’t write this to Timothy to discourage him, but to encourage him. He wrote this so that Timothy could repent, to show Him that it can be done because he continued. To show Timothy that it’s worth it, that this gospel is worth suffering for, and that the reward is eternal. As we read this, I hope that we can repent and grow in the same way that Paul wants Timothy to grow. To live a Godly life and suffer for the truth.

From Paul’s life, we can see that Paul is trustworthy because he continued. He died for what he believed in. He isn’t some selfish person, who taught Timothy for his own personal gain, but gave up everything so that Timothy could grow and be saved. And in light of this Paul gave Timothy the direction to continue in what he has learned.

Part3 how we can continue

Let’s read verses 14-15 together, let’s go, “14But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Paul’s direction for Timothy, despite persecution, and the terrible times of the last days, is to continue in what he has learned. He learned the scriptures from Paul, and Paul taught him many other things as well according to verse 10. They were brothers. And Paul just summed up his life for Timothy in the previous verses. So let’s say we have two teachers. One person is selfish and only loves themselves, they say one thing, but do the opposite, while the other is selfless, and sacrifices everything for you, and most importantly, he suffers for Jesus. The real mark that someone is trustworthy is that they suffer for Jesus. If someone doesn’t suffer for Jesus it’s because they love themselves. So who should you listen to? It’s obvious, the one who suffers for Jesus. Timothy should listen to Paul, because Paul has proven himself in his life. And not only that it looks like timothy has known the scriptures since he was a child, too. Timothy was very blessed to have known scripture since he was a child. Because he was being taught about Jesus, even though Jesus wasn’t mentioned by name in the scriptures available to him. Scripture is what makes us wise for salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ. Scripture shows us that it is only Jesus who can save us, and that through his death and resurrection we are saved, nothing else. And scripture is all we need to know who Jesus is.

From verses 14 and 15 Paul presents two reasons why Timothy should continue in what he has learned; having a teacher whose life demonstrated the gospel, and the fact that Timothy knew scriptures from infancy.

Why are these two things enough? Why should they convince us to continue? It’s because, when we look at those who continue in this life we can see God in them and in their life. When we see the contrast of suffering, persecution, and endurance, with joy, peace, and love, we see God, and we want to know God. I don’t think anyone could deny the power of God they saw in Paul. Timothy clearly had a desire to know God, as we do. And as he saw God work in Paul in all he went through, he could be strengthened to continue and seek God. And when we see the power of God in the lives of Paul and in our teachers, and what they went through to suffer for the gospel and for us, we can’t help but be encouraged and find strength to continue as well, even though there is suffering. In fact it is this Godly life, the power of this life, and continuing in it, that will bring people to us so we can raise disciples of Jesus. To explain this point I’d like to share a story that’s been encouraging me lately.

David Livingston was born in Scotland in 1813. When he was young his dad would read him stories of Missionaries and medical missionaries exploits. And young David would look into his father’s eyes and say, you know daddy one day I’m going to be like that, I want to be a missionary, I want to be a doctor, I want to serve God. Eventually he packed his bags and went to Africa. He came back home 5 years later, and when he came back his wife could hardly recognize him. Once as he was traveling to preach, he walked into a branch that had completely blinded him in one eye and marred the other. His skin was burned by the sun, his face marred and scarred, one eye blinded. One time he was attacked by a lion that tore one of his shoulders apart, he miraculously survived. But soon, the mission field kept calling him and he knew he had to go back. After a long time his wife joined him, and the day she stepped onto African soil she contracted a disease and a few days later he was burying her. An eye witness saw him kneeling before the grave and he was weeping his heart out and praying, “my Jesus my king my life my all, I again consecrate my life to thee, I shall place no value in anything I possess except in regard to your kingdom and your service.” A little while later a journalist Henry Stanley found him who was a press reporter to do a story about David Livingstone’s life. When they met Henry Stanley said, I’m the biggest swaggering atheist on the face of the planet, please don’t try to convert me. They travelled together for a while, and 4 months later, the biggest swaggering atheist on the face of the planet knelt down on African soil and gave his life to Jesus Christ. What Henry Stanley said in his biography was that the power of that Christ life was awesome and I had to buckle in I couldn’t hold out any longer.

Again, Henry Stanley said, the power of that Christ life was awesome. He saw God in David Livingston, and he could not deny it. When David Livingston continued Henry Stanley became a Christian and he too was able to continue as well. There is power in this life, unexplainable power. Continue in what you have learned. And if you continue, people will come to you, and you will even convert the biggest swaggering atheist on the face of the planet. Remember the lives of your teachers, how their lives revealed God to you, and you can continue, when almost everyone else fails. If we look at our life too; at our teachers and the things they taught us in the bible. And we see how God has worked in their lives and blessed them, we too can make a good case for continuing in what we have learned. As wickedness increases and persecution gets greater and greater, we CAN continue if we can hold on to these 2 things, the life of our teachers, and what they taught us, we can overcome anything that comes our way. Can anyone here honestly say that they were taught a lie? No, we were taught the truth.

In the next two verses Paul explains the value and usefulness of scripture. Let’s read verse 16 together, lets’ go. 16All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness

Paul says that scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. God breathed means that it is from the very mouth of God, so no other text can teach, rebuke, and correct as the bible does. When the word of God comes to people they are changed. They are taught, corrected, and even rebuked by the word of God. Are you treating the bible like it’s God breathed?

Paul also says the word of God is useful for training in righteousness. The bible shows us how to have the right relationship with God. If people aren’t trained in righteousness what do they do? When persecution comes they submit. When they start a family, God’s work is stopped, and they focus on financial security.

Lastly Paul tells timothy that scripture thoroughly equips him to do good works. As Christians we are meant to do good works. Let’s read verse 17 together, let’s go, “17so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” You are only thoroughly equipped for good works through scripture and knowing scripture.

Scripture is valuable, so we should continue in what we learn from it. But Paul told Timothy to do this. So that means it’s not in our nature to do so. It requires effort, and sacrifice to put into practice the teachings in the bible. We may not even realize what’s going on. When things like our jobs, our families, or persecution and suffering hit, it only seems natural to put the teachings in the bible on the side to focus on the things that come up. In fact this seems like common sense to most people. But what does the bible say? “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,” “make disciples of all nations,” “fan into flame the gift of God”, “do your best to present yourself to God as one approved”, and “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for u.”

I was invited to bible study by missionary Philip. Where is he? He helped me to live a Godly life. He encouraged me to keep bible study, and to meditate on the word of God by writing deep bible testimonies. Through this it became very clear to me how I should live before God. That happened in 2005, about 7 years ago. In those 7 years, I’ve graduated from college, started working full time, I got married, and now on July 15 God gave me the most adorable baby boy. And with all these things that go on, I become more independent, and philip isn’t in my life as much anymore. And as all these things were going on I noticed that continuing in what I learned slowly went downhill, and God’s work was stopping. When we had bible study, he completely convinced me of his teachings and that Jesus was the only way to heaven. So the question then becomes, will I continue in what he taught me? Or let’s take it even deeper. What if every single Christian I knew was gone and went to heaven? Would I still continue? I think this passage has come at the absolute most perfect time for me. I started working on this message just a few weeks before my son was born, and after he was born, so many thoughts turned to work, and financial things, how will I raise him, will I continue to give offering? And so forth. So based on this passage I need continue in what I have been taught. Philip always goes on and on and on about daily bread, and I always take it very lightly and just ignore him, and not doing it is something that has been preventing me from continuing. So I pray to make time available in the morning by going to bed earlier, but even if I’m not able to go sleep early, do it anyway at the expense of sleep. I need to do this because I need to continue so I can do good works. As a Christian I need to do good works, so I also pray to be thoroughly equipped to do good works. I still want to go fishing on campus regularly. With a kid and my wife and I both working all I can think of is how hard it will be to find time, but Paul doesn’t say, continue in what you have learned only when it’s easy. I am choosing to have two days off during the week so I can go to campus twice a week. Actually that schedule starts tomorrow. So I’m going to leave the conference right when it ends to be at work by 1, and I’m going to have to start leaving church as soon as it ends to get to work too. I’m really, really not looking forward to this, because I just want to relax and talk with friends after church. So please pray for me to endure for the gospel and go fishing. I pray that I can continue, no matter what.

Based on this passage I pray that as things get more and more difficult for us, we can all continue in what was taught to us, so we can overcome the terrible times of last days and we can be equipped to do good works. May God help us as we endure persecution and suffering and continue in his word.

One word: continue in what you have learned