

# Holding Fast to the Holy Scriptures

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Well, congregation, I invite you to open your Bibles again to 2 Timothy 3 as I reread the words of our text. 2 Timothy 3 and from verse 14 through 17, a message that I hope to bring you this afternoon, I preached this morning, especially in connection with the baptism service, though as I hope you'll see, it is connecting to all sorts of things and is very relevant to our time, especially now as well.

So 2 Timothy 3:14,

14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; 15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

Well, beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, are you flexible? Don't we need to be flexible? And I don't mean now what a gym teacher might say when he's trying to get young people or children to do the splits or put their legs behind their heads or something that is only what a few people can do in life, but I'm thinking more of in terms of life in general. Flexibility is important, isn't it? If you think of young families with children and little children and the schedules that they try to keep and the routines that they try to set up for their family, I'm sure every set of parents here knows what it's like to have to learn flexibility. Things don't always go the way that you want them to go and you have to be flexible. But not just when children are little, just yesterday I had a father of older children say to me, "I'm sure having to learn that too still now with older children," going to work and social life and all kinds of other things, and how to keep a schedule at home takes, well, takes among other things flexibility. We know this in life too, generally, don't we? At work or just with things going on in the world, if we don't learn to roll with things somewhat, that can be quite hard and generally speaking the more flexible we can be, the better off things are for us, the better we can do in life.

So we understand that, the importance of flexibility, but having said that, isn't it also true that there are other times in other spheres of life where it is important to be exactly the opposite? I mean now, inflexible, unbending, not willing to budge. Again, in family life, think of parents rightly insisting on the obedience of their children. It's important to be as inflexible on that as possible. Or teachers maintaining standards of classroom behavior and homework assignments. Or what about thinking the whole field of inspecting, of food inspectors and building inspectors and safety inspectors. You would not want to be a person who drives over a bridge that has been okayed or approved by a safety inspector known to be quite flexible in their adherence to the standards.

So we understand there's a time to be flexible and there's a time to be inflexible. Why am I beginning this way? Well, because Paul is writing to Timothy and Paul is saying, "Timothy, with regard to the word of God, you may never be flexible, you need to be inflexible." That's really the main point of the passage that's before us. It's, of course, a very important passage and much that can be gleaned from it, indeed whole books have been written on different verses and different ideas in these verses, but the main point is very simple, very straightforward and very clear. Just listen again as it comes out in verse 14, "Timothy," Paul is saying, "continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures." So the things in view are the teachings or the doctrines or the truths of the word of God and Paul has passed them on to Timothy, others have as well, and now Paul is saying to Timothy, "Make sure, Timothy, that you hold fast to those teachings, to that word of God." That's the point. "Make sure that you are a man who is inflexibly bound and committed to the word of God."

That's the burden of the Apostle Paul. That's why he writes as he does here at the end of chapter 3, and we could say that it's not just for Timothy, it's for all God's people always, including here, including today, and including with new generations coming up under our care, under our watch, of the church of Jesus Christ. Holding fast to the holy scriptures. Can ask, "Are you doing that? Are we doing that? Is that our priority and our passion as well?"

As we notice these words from Paul and this theme as we unpack it, we can make several points. The first one is: urgency. We are to hold fast to the holy scriptures urgently, in other words, with great seriousness and intensity. "It's so important," Paul would say, "Timothy, that you hold fast to the holy scriptures." Now how do we hear that urgency in the text? If you look at verse 14, you notice again how it starts, "But continue thou." But continue thou, in other words, Paul is drawing here a contrast and in order to hear the effect of the contrast, you have to remember all that has come before. We could start at the beginning of the letter but just leaving it now to chapter 3 especially as we read it earlier. In chapter 3, Paul is highlighting a number of dangers that threaten the church and threaten individual believers, and threaten the ministry of Timothy, and so Paul goes through these dangers and that's when he says, "But thou, Timothy, continue in the things that thou has learned." It's important to see that that contrast is what is driving also the urgency of the text. Paul's not saying, "Oh, and by the way, Timothy, make sure, you

know, you're committed." No, Paul build his case and then Paul says, "And now, Timothy, in view of all this, continue in these things."

So what are the dangers that Paul describes? What are the dangers that Paul describes? 1. Is the prevalence of wicked people or the prevalence, you could say, simply of wickedness. Is that not how the chapter starts? In verse 1, "This know also, that in the last days," by the way, "last days," when is that? "Last days" as Paul describes it here is what is often the way of the Bible in describing the whole period of time between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming. We are living in the last days of the age of this world and so Paul is writing about his time and he's writing about our time, and he's writing about all time, and so he's saying, "Timothy, here's what you need to know. Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, here's what you need to know. In the last days, in all these days," what? "Perilous times shall come." Perilous or troublesome or days of stress and trial.

And why is that, Paul? Well, Paul tells us, "men shall be lovers of their own selves," narcissists, "covetous, boasters, proud," and the list goes on, 19 different characteristics of the men of this world, of this age of these last days, and it's all negative and altogether it's a picture of great wickedness. And Paul could even say in verse 13, and they will get worse and worse, "evil men and seducers shall wax," or shall become, "worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." And now Paul is saying, "Timothy, you will find people like this and you will meet them, and you need to know what to do when you encounter them. You need to turn away from them. You need to be sure not to be influenced by them nor to be directed by them nor to be controlled or corrupted by them. No, you need to live separately and distinctly." But not that we don't shine as lights and be witnesses and evangelize if the opportunities come, but the key thing, Paul says, in verse 5, is "from such people turn away."

The prevalence of wickedness. Do we not have to agree with the apostle? He was right. This is happening. This has always been happening and we are seeing it still at every level of society and throughout the world. Not that by nature we are any different or any better, it's true, of course, that evil lives in every human heart, yours and mine as well, but what Paul is describing here is unrestrained, unashamed giving over to wickedness and sin, and that is one reality that is marking our day, and that is a reality that gives urgency to the exhortation to hold fast to the holy scriptures.

But then there's another point and that's the pressure of false teaching. The prevalence of wickedness and the pressure of false teaching. Paul refers to this in verse 6 through 9. Religious people who are really wicked people and deceptive people and they find a way to worm into the homes and hearts of their community, and they bring a falsehood and they lead people astray. Now they were able to get in, in Paul's day, these teachers, they were able literally to get inside people's homes, it partly had to do with the culture, the hospitality and the greater mingling of households and of people, generally speaking. It's different with us, of course, we all have our own little four-walled homes, as it were, and it's just our family in our home and everything's guarded and safe.

But of course, there are other ways to get into our homes, if we just think of media and of our phones and of podcasts and YouTubes and all the rest, and if we're not careful, if we're not discerning, if we're not always measuring everything we hear by the touchstone of the truth of God's word. I mean, how many in this world at large are being duped by false teaching? If we just think of the millions of people in North America only who regularly listen to the health and wealth preachers of the day, how many people in North America truly believe God wants you most of all to be healthy and wealthy and happy? They think that's what it's all about. They genuinely do.

Or else people think that Jesus is commendable, he's exemplary, but they bristle at the idea that he's exclusive. He's not the only way. There are many ways to God, there has to be. And for how many people today the creed is not, "I believe in the Triune God and God saves those who trust in his Son," but, "I believe in the god of my choice and God saves those who are sincere."

How many people today are convinced that God has to be okay with immorality? Well, they will not call it immorality. We call it immorality, men marrying men, women marrying women, if we can even describe it in that way. How people are convinced that has to be fine and the church should accept it and God must smile upon it, because after all, these people love each other and they are committed to one another?

I'm just giving you a few examples but they are well-known enough, but there are many more and they are a result of false teaching, pernicious ideas that have a way of going through the communities and the culture, and Paul says, "They will mark the last days, Timothy. That's why you need to hold fast to the holy scriptures."

Then one other thing Paul mentions and what helps to highlight the urgency, Paul refers to the persecutions we can expect. The persecutions we can expect. Of course, Paul himself was often persecuted and he writes about that. Even in this chapter, he lists different cities: Antioch, Iconium, Lystra. You can read more about that in the book of Acts. Paul describes various experiences like when he was stoned or when he was beaten, when he was run out of town. He suffered for the gospel's sake. It wasn't easy for Paul but he says it's not easy for any Christian. Verse 12, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." Though maybe not like Paul, maybe not to the same extent as Paul, but at some point and in some way God's people all encounter some form of suffering. It may be as mild as people turning away from you in disgust when they find out you confess to be a Christian. Or maybe just sort of writing you off when you profess to believe in Judeo-Christian morality and they say, "We're finished with you." Or it could be worse. It could be that you lose your job on account of your faith. It could be that you lose your peace and quiet. It could be that you lose your freedom. For how many in this world throughout the history of this world, that has men losing their life?

Now even to say all that, it's said often enough but it can seem still so remote. I mean, is this true what Paul writes? But just this week I received a letter, many churches did, from ARPA, a letter from ARPA telling about a law that is planned by our federal government, it was planned back in March then fell off the table to the proroguing and whatever else,

but is back on the table, a law that will make it a criminal offense to counsel people away from a homosexual or transgender lifestyle. Now it's hard to know all the details. There are those who will be pushing the government to clarify it, and also to make sure that the church is exempt in some way from these conversion therapy bans, as they're being called, but it's hard to know how it will all turn out. Already the government is saying there will be fines for people who do this sort of thing, there will be jail time for people who do this sort of thing. Imagine that, reading in the church on repentance and the government saying, "You can't do that anymore." Counseling a member in a counseling session and the police showing up to say, "You can't do that anymore." Well, it's not necessarily that far away and Paul would say, "Don't be surprised. All who will live godly will suffer persecution."

So, "Timothy," Paul is saying and to us too, "this is your world. This is your context. The prevalence of wickedness, the pressure of false teaching, and the persecutions you can count on." And then if we think of all three of these together, do they not represent a mountain of stress potentially, and bring with them a great temptation? Because they can escape all of it, or at least ease something of it, if we just, you know, lighten up regarding the word of God. Round off the edges a little bit here and there. Be a bit more flexible, right, then all the problems will go away and the world will smile at us once more, then we can live in peace again for a while if we just relax.

Can you imagine that kind of temptation? I can, and Paul with Timothy and with all God's people is writing here to head-off that temptation or to fortify Timothy to meet that temptation and that's why he says in verse 14 with this contrast, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of. Timothy, you must hold fast to the holy scriptures." Do you hear the urgency of the Apostle Paul and the intensity with which he gives this exhortation? "It's so serious, Timothy, it's so vital and important."

But let's ask the question now what does it mean? What does Paul mean when he says, "Timothy, you need to continue"? What does holding fast, what is that all about? With those questions we go to our next point: holding fast to the holy scriptures not only urgently but purposely. Purposely. In other words, being very thoughtful and deliberate and intense about holding fast to the holy scriptures. And here, of course, that's zeroing in on that word "continue. So continue in this, Timothy. You began, now keep on going, literally abide in these things. So no forsaking the truth, no compromising the scriptures, no diluting the word of God in any way. No, continue, remain true, be inflexible."

Now just at this point, notice something special in the text, notice how Paul refers to the fact that Timothy has been taught. Timothy has been taught because he says, "continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures." So Paul says several things here that are important to notice. One is that Timothy has been long taught the word of God and, of course, that's true. I mean, it was Paul who came and taught Timothy but before Paul there was his mother, Timothy's mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois. You can read about those women in chapter 1, women of the faith, women in whose home and under whose care Timothy was reared and nurtured. We may

well believe that Timothy received through them very diligent and faithful teaching, that Eunice and Lois were thoughtful and intense and faithful as all parents and grandparents should be. Not that we have to have degrees in teaching, but isn't it true that in all our time with our children and in all the activities with grandchildren, as much as they're so much to enjoy together, is it not so important above all else that we prioritize reading the word of God and explaining the word of God, and living out the word of God? How important that is.

Here in the church of God, here when we have all these covenant families, let it be that all our youth can say that from a child they have known the holy scriptures. Let it be that none of our youth have to say, "It's all new to me what I'm hearing." Well, through the Holy Spirit it can be new but there should be a sense in which every covenant young person has to say, "I never knew a time when I didn't know about the Lord Jesus Christ. I never knew a time when the Bible wasn't in our home, wasn't read and loved in our home, wasn't followed in our home."

We can teach our children so many things, can't we? And we need to, we need to teach them how to work, and we need to teach them different skills and maybe we have opportunity to teach them things like hockey skills or music lessons or maybe families go hunting or something, some activities that they can enjoy together, but there's so much to learn and to teach our children but this must be number 1, the holy scriptures, the word of God. Timothy was taught from his youth.

But what is more, this is for all our children and our young people, we can say that Timothy was a good student. He was a good student. He didn't just get taught, he learned. Paul says, "You have learned." We all know how it's possible to sit through a class and it's possible to endure someone teaching you, it's possible to undergo a lesson and yet be completely checked out so that when it's all over, you get up and you go on your way and you didn't learn anything at all. Well, children can do that, young people can do that, adults can do that, but again staying with the children and the young people, what kind of students are you? What kind of students are you when your parents read to you from the word of God maybe after the meal? Or when there's a family discussion about the sermon? Or in Bible class at school? Or in some other subject when the word of God is brought to bear on it in a particular way? What kind of student are you? Timothy learned. He was taught and he learned. Are you learning. Are you seeking to learn?

Notice something else, notice that Paul says, "Timothy, you learned and you were assured, continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of." So that means there is this sense in which Timothy didn't just soak in the facts, Timothy didn't just do his memory work, you might say. No, but there was more to it. Timothy, he responded to the teaching. He submitted to the teaching. He embraced the teaching. He believed it. He believed it. He believed what his mom said, what his grandma taught him. He believed what Paul shared when Paul came and taught and preached. Timothy heard it all, he listened to it all, he considered it all, he embraced it all. He was assured. He was persuaded. It's like the truth entered into him and gave light and made an impact and even wrought a transformation. And of course, we all need the grace of God for that. That's

true, we need the Holy Spirit to give new life and to nurture that life, but that simply this reference to Timothy's experience make you and me seek for that for ourselves, that whenever we hear the scriptures, we hear them and we believe them.

Timothy did and now, says Paul, "Timothy, you have got to hold fast to it all. "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of." Continue in them, that means don't abandon them, don't forsake them, don't be swayed by the times in which you live, don't be influenced by wickedness, don't be corrupted by false teaching, don't let persecution weaken your commitment to the truth of the word of God. "No, Timothy, hold fast." Do you hear the purpose, the intention? Paul is calling here for deliberate action on account of the dangers and in view of the times. This is what to do, be inflexibly dedicated to what you have learned and know to be true from the word of God.

It needs to be the great commitment of our heart. It needs to be the principle of our life. It needs to be what governs our home, our family, so that no matter what happens, we are not bending with regard to all that God has revealed. It will not be possible to tear us away from our belief in the Bible and from our submission to its every word. No, with purpose we will hold fast.

Timothy needed this encouragement, at least Paul seemed to think so, and we can understand it wasn't easy to live in those days. "Timothy, Timothy, let me tell you, just hold fast." But we face the same challenge, don't we? It's not easy to live in our day. It's not easy to raise up families in our day. We know and that's sad, we know that we live in times when there are those who are not continuing, there are those who are not holding fast. No doubt we can all think of examples maybe in our families, often a source of a lot of grief and sorrow. Or maybe in our communities. Certainly around the world there are examples, many of them, illustrations of people, of whole churches just not holding fast. We are living in testing times. We are being sifted and we are being challenged to hold fast.

How do we do that? How do we do our utmost in this respect? Well, of course, we need the Lord himself to hold us up and to keep us. We need him more than anything. We're dependent entirely on his grace, that's true, but how important it is that we ourselves keep reading the word. Are you still disciplined in your daily devotions? Do you still try to be regular and faithful with family worship? Do you still seek the Lord earnestly for your own soul and for your family as you read the word, praying that he might seal the truths of his word to your own heart, to the hearts of your children, and in your life and in your family life there may be a reflection, that we may be living epistles of Christ, as Paul says elsewhere, known and read of all men because the word has entered in and transformed us? How important it is to hold fast with purpose.

But maybe someone says, "Well, fair enough. The point is clear, but is it really so important? I mean, after all, what is it that makes the holy scriptures themselves so special? What makes them such that it is vital that we hold them fast?" Now that's a good question. Many people have asked that question, maybe some of you, maybe you are

asking it even now. Why is the Bible so important that we must hold fast to it? What's so great about our text is that Paul answers that question. He anticipates and he answers that very question and that's our last point this afternoon: holding fast to the holy scriptures confidently. Confidently.

But before we consider it more, let's sing. Let's pause to sing from Psalter #332, all the stanzas, "Forever settled in the heavens. Thy word, O Lord, shall firmly stand." 332, all the stanzas.

Imperfect I have found all else. No doubt Paul would echo that, really that's his point here as he wraps up this chapter as he's seeking to instill within Timothy and all who read, confidence in the word of God. Boundless is God's wondrous love.

And Paul says a number of things and we can only be brief but one of the things he mentions here is in terms of the author of the scriptures. Who wrote the holy scriptures? Of course, we know there were human authors, there were many of them. We can think of Moses and David, Isaiah. We can think of Paul himself. Human authors. But what does Paul say in verse 16, a verse that is so well-known, so familiar to us that we maybe miss the significance of it? "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." That is staggering. All scripture. That is staggering because that means that this book that we call the Bible, this book that has human authorship, yes, has more than human authorship, this book has divine authorship. It is a book that is literally from out of this world. God wrote the book, Paul is saying, and we should never lose the wonder and the glory of that.

You know, in your Bible you find a revelation of the mind of the all-knowing, all-glorious, most gracious God. "Inspired by God," says Paul, "is the scripture." That means that the words are his. He inspired them. He breathed them out. He directed them. We do not read in the Bible the words of mere men, we read, we hear, we study, we love the words of the living God and that means that we can hold fast to the holy scriptures with great confidence. These are not empty words. God cannot lie. These are not lying words, these are hope-filled words, these are true, rich, good, sure words for they are God's words.

Something else, though, is not just the author but the subject, the theme of the scriptures. What are they all about? You know, you don't find in the Bible 10 tips on how to grow a good garden, or how to grow a good business, or how to raise even a great family. I mean, the Bible speaks to all those subjects in some way or form but the fundamental focus of the Bible is so much more. Paul says in verse 15, "the holy scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation," salvation, "through faith which is in Christ Jesus." The Bible tells us about that, about how we need a Savior, how we live in a world that has been broken on account of sin. Well, we know that when we look around but the Bible explains it, it's broken because of sin, it's cursed because of sin. We are on our way to death because of sin and there is no one who can save us from death. The government is trying. In recent days, the government thinks it can save us, it has that duty to save us from death. It can't. Only God can save us from death truly, and he does it through his Son, his beloved Son Jesus Christ.



Oh, how much is bound up in that phrase at the end of 15, "through faith which is in Christ Jesus." We know about Christ Jesus because we know the scriptures. We know he's the Son of God who came into this world, who lived a perfect life. He lived a spotless life, a holy, God-glorifying life. He lived a life we ought to live but never can in ourselves. He lived it perfectly so that he could present it to his Father so that through his Father's grace and by the Spirit he could give it to us, all who trust him, his life. Then at the climax of his life, as we know, he died. Though he was so good, he still died because on him was the judgment. It was because he was so good that he could bear the judgment and he bore it in all its fullness in a way that we can never understand. "All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way." The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all and so he went to the cross, and so he was forsaken, and so he absorbed every last drop of God's infinite judgment so that he might deliver sinners like you and me from the death we deserve and bring us into the light we could never earn.

What a salvation we may have through Jesus Christ. We who are sinners, we come to him bringing only sin and he washes our sin away, and he clothes us with his own righteousness, and we escape the judgment, and we get ushered into life. "He who believes in the Son of God shall never die," Jesus said. Even now, you know the Lord God through the gospel calls to us. Every time the gospel is preached, it calls to us. If we have not heard, we have not come, if we are not yet trusting in his Son, "Come to me and live," he says. And at the same time, to keep on trusting him, every day to walk in faith in Christ. And the point is this, is what the Bible is all about. If you don't see that yet, you don't understand the Bible. It's able to make you wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

So God is the author, it's all about salvation, and then one more reason to hold fast to this word with confidence is because this book teaches us the way to live well, or as we like to say today, the way to do life and to do it successfully. That's what the scriptures teach us. That's what Paul makes clear in verse 16 and 17 when he talks about these scriptures being inspired and how they are profitable. That means they are useful, they are effective. What for? For doctrine, so that we know what is true, so we know what to believe, and likewise for reproof, correction and training, for instruction in righteousness so that we know how to live. And here's the point: his word shows every man of God, every woman of God, every believer in Jesus Christ the way to go, the way to honor God in all things, the way to be equipped for service in this world, the way to live a life of good works.

The Bible teaches us how to do life well to the glory of the Lord our God, to do it in such a way that when we come to our last breath and enter into the presence of God, we may hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." You don't know how to do that on your own. I don't know how to do that on my own. The Bible shows us the way and shows us the way through pointing us to Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, helping us to be instructed and corrected and directed by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, to honor our God in all things.

Let me ask you: have we not experienced that? All true confessing Christians among us, has it not been so many times again, over and over again that the Bible has been a lamp to our feet and a light to our path? Maybe in family life we didn't know what to do and the word of God led us down the right way. Maybe in other things, maybe in relationship to our neighbors, maybe in our work in this world, maybe simply as we sorted out the anxieties of our own heart, maybe as we tried to understand our calling to shine in the darkness, time after time we go to the word of God and the light appears and the voice of the living God sounds as he says, "This is the way. Walk in it." Is this not, then, why we love the word because we can trust it? It is a word to hold fast with confidence.

"Yes, to hold fast to the holy scriptures, Timothy, that's the call urgently, purposely, and confidently." Paul was counseling his young protegee, his young student in the faith, "Continue in the things you have learned. Be so inflexible with regard to the word of the Lord." That's the calling and not just to Timothy but to you and to me and to the church. That's the calling, "Hold fast." By the grace of God, congregation, let's be doing that, holding fast. Amen.

Let us pray.

*Lord our God, we pray that you will bless your word, also this word. We give thanks that from a child, many of us, if not all of us, have known the holy scriptures. We give thanks that also among us there is that commitment still in family life to teach the children, to train the youth in the fear of God, and in light of your holy word. Lord, that's a privilege we recognize that is undeserved, that there is still that commitment, that heart, that desire, and it's a gift of your grace, it's your faithfulness to us even when we have in ourselves been so unfaithful. But help us, O Lord, to see it and help us to continue to hold fast to the holy scriptures.*

*As we think about the times in which we find ourselves, in the challenges that are before us and the temptations maybe to relax and to be a bit more flexible, Lord, that we may resist all of that, that we may remember that your word is your word, and has to do with everlasting life, and leads us in the way of godliness and holiness and righteousness, and that we may therefore cling to it and stand by it, and submit to it, and be true to it. All of us, Lord, we pray that for our children as well as for ourselves. We pray that for us as individuals and families. We pray for that as a congregation, as a denomination, together with all like-minded churches, O Lord, that we may be faithful. Will you help us? We rely ultimately on your faithfulness. Will you help us and will you bless us? And we pray all this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, your beloved Son whom the scriptures lift up most of all, and whom you teach us to trust and to love and to follow. Lord, if we have not yet begun in that way, we pray that this afternoon we may begin and that we may persevere and be steadfast to the end. Hear our prayer. Forgive what was sinful even in this service and remember us in your lovingkindness and your tender mercy for Jesus' sake. Amen.*