

## Enduring for the Church

Let us turn to our Bibles to 2 Timothy chapter 2. 2 Timothy chapter 2. Verse 10, I want to drill into the aspect of being believers and enduring and bearing one another's burdens in the body of Christ, the doctrine of the communion or the fellowship of the saints, which is what's behind this text and part of Paul's concerns here has given to young Timothy. 2 Timothy chapter 2, verse 10. Let us listen attentively to the word of God.

Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory, let us pray. And in these words may it strike to our hearts, God, that we too should follow a similar path, although it's different insofar as we're not a public officer and we have different opportunities and gifts than Paul, to be sure. Gracious God, and you have blessed us insofar as we are not going through persecution the way he was.

Even so, Lord, that should be all the more that we double down in enduring, carrying the burden and loving the church of our Lord and Savior and not just in the abstract but in the concrete. Help us to that and we pray that the sermon will be edifying to that end and to be encouraging to us for I see us continuing to do that and, Lord, I wish we would not give up, that we would be encouraged and not faint in the day of our calling to love the elect of Christ. In your name we pray, amen.

The specific purpose of this verse is to highlight the apostle's call to publicly stand for the truth of Jesus as an example, he's not bragging, but as an example to Timothy as a minister that he too should do the same. Yet the specific truth is part of a larger moral reality that we are called to endure, that is to bear, taking it broader, to bear one another's burdens. The endurance here or the suffering could be translated as is a specific application of that broader principle we read of in Galatians 6. You recall that passage, to bear one another's burdens, to persevere in doing good for the sake of Christ and for the church.

I mentioned it last week and I'll say it again. Isn't it interesting that he says, I endure all things for what? You'd think for the sake of Jesus. Yes, that's true.

He implies that or says it elsewhere in so many words, but here he wants to emphasize also for the sake of the church, for the elect, for God's people. That's an expression of his love. It is for this theme of the sake of the church that I wish to delve into in this sermon.

As Christians with the high calling of following our Lord and Savior, we do so in the context of the community of the body of Christ. We are not islands. Just as Paul endured public humiliation for identifying with Christians in the gospel, so we are called to do the same and even more.

But we're also called to do more insofar as we are to endure through the hard work of caring and supporting one another. So there I'm using the word endure in a more neutral sense of hard work. It's something you have to endure sometimes, but it's a good endurance insofar as you have a good end, right? You do it for your family, you do it for your kids, and here I'm urging us to keep on doing it for the body of Christ.

That's what I mean. We do it in everyday life. I've witnessed it myself.

Of course, I think of more or less the private or the semi-private parts of life, not the public publicity. People are obviously not called, Christians are not called to run around and brag how much they've endured or suffered or worked or supported the body of Christ, but do it anyways. So let's look more carefully here to be further emboldened to bear with each other and exercising our abilities and opportunities for the kingdom of God, for the sake of the elect.

## **Shepherd's Endurance for the Church**

The first point here, the shepherds, plural possessive endurance for the church, they are called to endure. The leadership of the church is called to endure. Endure, again, in the best sense of the word, of the hard work it takes to lead and to protect and to discipline and to encourage.

It's important to know what pastors should be like, of course, for ourselves and for our children, our children's children. That's why these letters are here for us. 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus, written by Paul the Apostle.

I like to call them super pastors. They are pastors, but more than pastors. And he wrote them for posterity for us to see what is required of the leadership of the church.

After all, many people pick churches for many reasons, and yet willing to look the other way, of false teachings and practices, if they like something in that church. Specifically, we should be looking, of course, for faithful teaching, as Paul mentions elsewhere in his letters. Upright practices and family and public life, as we see in the description of what a bishop is supposed to be in 1 Timothy chapter 3, for example.

And here, we see by Paul's own example in his exhortation to Timothy, that he endured all things for the sake of the elect, for the church, the body of Christ. He wasn't just thinking of himself. This, too, is an important part of what it means to be a shepherd, to be one who loves the flock and cares for the saints of God.

Pastors should have, therefore, sympathy for their fellow Christians, that they don't like to see them going through sufferings and hardships, both of the body and of the soul. Sympathy should be part of what they have, and not this remoteness. I've run across this a few times.

I've heard it's sad stories from friends of mine who are in churches in which the pastor avoids him, because apparently he's just a guy who speaks bluntly, and the pastor doesn't want to hear that. That's not good shepherding. That's not- I don't understand that.

You should be able there as a pastor or as a ruling elder to talk, even if you have disagreements. You're there to be friendly. You're there to support.

Whatever is needful. You shouldn't make a point of trying to dodge. You shouldn't expect your church leadership to dodge you all the time.

That's not what Paul's clearly talking about. He identifies he's willing to suffer for them. That doesn't sound like a man who's willing to suffer for somebody.

Not in the least bit. That's not good. Men should stand for the truth.

Church leaders in the public realm, their thoughts and actions should be for the body of Christ, but unfortunately there are those who are in the public realm, typically I think in my experience, although I could be wrong. In the parachurches, where they're not seemingly attached to any church, any responsibility, they're out there, and it looks like they're making strong stances in the apologetic world, for example. I have no one of mine in particular, but they're not attached, and they don't think about what are the consequences of what they're doing and how that affects the body of Christ.

Certainly Paul does. He knows what he's doing and how much it affects, because he writes letters to these churches. We've read some of them.

What's going on? How are you doing? I hear bad things. I hear good things of you, and I'm concerned, and I want to be there to be helpful to you and not be another stumbling stone. You could be a stumbling stone of what? You're a church leader not attached to any particular church.

This is you and God, as it were, and you run around making all these decisions that perhaps make other Christians stumble, because you don't have a personal connection to the people that you should. That's why I don't think pastors should be floating around. They should be attached to churches.

They're not just pastors. Church leadership in general, the ruling elder, the deacons, they too should have a similar desire to endure for the sake of the elect, for God's people, for the church, ruling elders and deacons. They are called to endure the weakness of persecution, of course, but also be patient with the flock of Christ and the more specific sense of enduring the shortcomings of those around them.

Parents do this with their children because they love them, and to not lord over them and just look down upon them and say, you know, what's your problem? You're not a minister. You don't know what you're talking about. It doesn't mean, of course, that the ruling officers of the church should be pushovers.

Clearly not that, but part of their call is to endure, to persevere with the brothers and sisters in the church, even as they try to redirect them towards better Christian practices or teachings. But not just individual church officers either. Churches as churches, as an organization, as an institution between churches or inter- or intra-church relationships are important here.

Paul writes to other churches, not just the ones he's even established, but other churches, and they interact with one another. As an institution, when leaders act as one to support

other churches, they also can, as it were, put up with other churches. When you're on a denomination, you endure other churches that have slightly different understandings or practices, and we should do that out of love, to the extent that we are able and good conscience, of course.

Because love covers a multitude of sins, not just individual love between you and I, but between churches, brothers and sisters. This is one reason why I strongly believe in Presbyterianism, the connectionalism, that we're connected to one another more than just talk, but we actually have an institutional connection in courts, in exchange of monies, because we give support that way, and of course prayers and whatnot. That's part of what it means in practical ways.

And of course, not just as an institution, as a corporate body, but as a collection of individuals as well, like when we have church picnics and like, and we invite other congregations to come. This too is an expression of working and bearing with one another and using our gifts to help the body of Christ beyond just our own little circle as best we can. Now that's just the officers, and I of course want to drill into the rest of us.

The endurance for the church, your endurance, you as a layman, you as a Christian, insofar as you can help and persevere and use what God has given you to be useful in God's kingdom.

## **Your Endurance for the Church**

So this is the second point. Remember, we are called to bear one of those burdens in Galatians 6, 1 and following.

And that may involve, of course, suffering for each other in the sense of enduring social humiliation, which is what Paul, I think, is emphasizing here. Not that he's, oh, I'm putting up with these Corinthian Christians, but rather he's enduring actual punishment in prison for preaching the gospel, because he wants to teach and instruct the church of God, and the pagan institutions want to shut that down, the leadership does. Rome wants to shut that down, more precisely the Jews.

That's part of it, of course, that we are called to do, that we will be looked down upon and ridiculed for being Christians, for standing for the truth, taking the Lord's day seriously. This is the Lord's day, it's not anybody else's day. I know we have another name for this day today, and we can use it, that's fine, but I like to think more and more I don't want to use that word Superbowl Sunday.

It's just Superbowl time, and it's impinging upon God's time. But bearing the burdens of the church as well, in the sense of enduring the shortcomings of each other, that too is our calling. Love covers a multitude of sins.

It's not just for the pastors, it's for all of us. To bear with the weaker brother, as Paul writes a whole chapter on that. And those who have a confused way of thinking on a particular

matter, a confused doctrine, confused practices sometimes, or they bind themselves more than they should from the Word of God, then we bear with them.

We're like, okay, well I can put up with that for a while, I mean, I can't deal with everything. We do that with our children. You've had, all you adults who've raised children, you know, you could probably name all their flaws when they're one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, up to ten, but you couldn't nail all those flaws.

Some of you just kind of let it go, because you had to deal with other flaws that were more pressing and more serious. And that's what the Christian life is like. In other words, you're living at the Lord's hand sometimes.

It's like, okay, God, I can only do so much. And that's true. You can only do so much.

But also, bearing in the sense of, as I mentioned at the beginning, in the neutral sense of enduring the hard work it takes to be a member of the body of Christ. Because it does take work, and you must persevere or endure through that hard work. What you should do with joy in your heart and with the expectation that this is the right thing to do and I want to do the right thing.

And I know it's hard work. We can't deny it. We're designed to work.

We have to get a job. We have to take care of our house. We have to fix things.

And this is true spiritually as well in the body of Christ, in his church, the local congregations. So that's what I also mean by enduring. Suffering by publicly identifying with Secondly, bearing with the shortcomings of one another.

And thirdly, persevering and keeping on and working hard, enduring the hard work of what it means to be useful in God's kingdom and bearing one another's burdens. I use our resources, our time, and everything else that God has given us as appropriate to meet the needs of each other as the situation arises. And it's true, of course, that sometimes sin and our weaknesses and Satan, as it were, whispers in our ears that it sure is a lot of work being a Christian and having to put up with Christians, other Christians, and their shortcomings.

What's up with that? And it's easy, relatively speaking, our situation in America makes it easy to get up, leave a church, and go somewhere else. And just like, I don't want to deal with these people. I don't want to endure.

I'm done with this. And there is a time for that. I'm not making fun of that.

But I think it's often done way too much in my experience. And I think Tripps and others, we've seen this. They just throw up their hands like, did you even put any work in it? You just got offended.

I've seen this. People are like, well, he walked by me and he looked like he was looking at me cross-eyed. I don't know what his problem was.

And he blew up and left. Things like that. It's straight.

You're just like, what? I don't understand. They don't want to endure. It's typically another reason, not just that.

That's just what trips it. It's another reason behind the reason. We all know this.

We've done it ourselves. We're weak. And spouses, what? They fight over the toothpaste.

Put the lid on. You didn't put the line on. Whatever else.

Because something else is agitating them, typically. And that happens in the church as well. And the temptation is not to endure, to persevere in doing good works, and bearing one another, and carrying one another's burdens.

That's what it says in Galatians 6. Burdens. And so, we shouldn't listen to the devil, to the world, to our flesh, but listen to the Word of God. And we have this summarized here in the confession, chapter 26, on the saints, the communion of the saints.

Paragraph 1. It's two paragraphs long. It's one of the unique aspects of the confession, besides the part on the Holy Spirit. All saints that are united to Jesus Christ, their head, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces.

I'm only reading part of it. All saints are united to Jesus Christ in their head. Being united in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces.

Our unity in Christ means more than just our unity in Christ. It's our unity with one another. And you heard that this morning in 1 Corinthians 10, where it says we are one body, one bread, because we are united with Christ.

All are obligated, I'm continuing to read chapter 26 of the confession, all are obligated to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good both in the inward and outward man. So, we're obligated to move outside our comfort zone here historically, that there's not only just your family and community and nation, that's always been the case since the beginning of Adam and Eve. Our clubs, our employments, our communities, whatever else we make up in our relationships, but the church is part of our responsibility as well.

The Jewish background, of course, the New Testament church, in which the Jews were first, the Jews were your nation, were your community, they were your employment, they were your club or whatever else you make, relationship-wise. They were the church, but God changed all that and said, well now you can be a Gentile, you don't have to be uniquely Jewish, you don't have to dress a certain way and eat a certain way and go to Jerusalem. So, this whole ceremonial system and all that, it's done away with.

You can act like a Gentile, short of violating the law of God, clearly. You can dress like them, talk like them, eat like them, it's okay. And that's the context here, and you can imagine trying to mix these two together, like, well and water.

And so you have, what, over 52 verses talking about one another, one another, one another, one another. Get together because this institution has changed compared to the Old Testament, where it was more comfortable to be around people that were, you know, you, you were all Jewish. You had this way of acting that was more careful, more precise, right? It's a very specific application of a number of commandments where God restricted them and their food and their clothing, for example.

But on top of that, all the oral traditions that were built up by the Pharisees, you got to be careful how you walk, you got to wash yourself unless you touch a Gentile, a goyim, oh no. So that adds another layer of complexity, if you can imagine, that Paul is trying to break through here and say, look, all that's done away with. You need to get comfortable with one another and to be united and put some effort into the body of Christ and to endure and to carry one another's burdens.

And so that's the emphasis there in the context. Union with Christ, therefore, of course, is the basis of why we are called to endure for the sake of the elect. First John 1.3, that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, the apostle writes, that you also may have fellowship with us.

And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. So very clearly, he ties us there that we have fellowship and union with our Lord and Savior, and therefore he prays that for all of us. We declare to you that you also have fellowship with us, because we have fellowship with the Father.

That's the connection. And expressed, of course, externally in the act of baptism. A public act that we share with Christian churches across the world and time, that we are united to Christ and set apart for a holy purpose.

But this, of course, should give way to practical outworkings, and thus a confession there in chapter 26 tells us that we share one another's gifts and graces and are obliged to the performance of such duties, whether public or private, that conduce to their mutual good, that is the means, causation, and provocations thereunto, everything that works out to that end, both in the inward and outward man. So that's a sharing of the gifts, the using of the gifts. Ephesians 4.15 is a classic passage there.

Paul writes, Paul goes right to the imagery of a body. He's done this before. Right? In Corinthians.

Here, he's like, you're a body. You're like bones and joints and sinews and the like, knitted together, and you each have a part to play. The effectual working of every part.

You're a part that you should do your share, and therefore causes the growth of the body for the building up or the edifying of itself, of the body itself in love. You all have a part. That's what he's saying very compactly that he unpacks there in 1 Corinthians and Romans as well.

We are gathered together and knitted into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit, spiritually, and externally by, of course, baptism and our common confession, so that we have obligations to one another. To direct, redirect, in other words, some of our resources that we would have otherwise for ourselves, for our family, for our community, but to give it to the Church of Jesus Christ and to those, of course, especially who are in need. And these are, of course, in which we are called, therefore, to endure and to work to this end that we would be useful and use these resources, because it's worth it.

We are to, therefore, weep when others weep, and to rejoice when others rejoice. That's the same idea elsewhere. Written by Paul.

This is our calling to endure, to bear, and to persevere in the Church of Jesus Christ. Again, in 1 Corinthians 12.7, that's the Corinthians passage I was referencing, there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. Verse 4. There are diverse differences of ministry, but the same Lord.

And there are diversities of activities, but it's the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all, but the manifestation is, therefore, of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all, is what we have. In other words, we have something to contribute when the Spirit is behind it.

We have a diversity, of course, some are better at one thing, some have more money, some have more time, some have more talent, combination of this, combination of that, on particular things, at particular times, in particular seasons of your life. Publicly, privately, directly or indirectly, it matters not, and we should not hold back, hide, nor bury our talents from the Church. The gifts, of course, of the talents, or whatever words that remind you, again, the word grace is sometimes, is another way of saying gifts, it could be translated gifts, it's just graceful gifts that God has given us.

Time, money, resources, personal ability, training, spiritual, material as well, energy and strength and ability, the things of this world is also very helpful for the body of Christ, obviously, fruit of the Spirit. These are the things the Spirit has given us for one another. Gifts for the good of each other, we see this in the book of Acts, of course, the saints helping each other, both spiritually and materially, it's mentioned twice, explicitly, that they had all things in common, that they sold the extra stuff they had and gave it to those in need around them, and they took these things seriously.

What the Confession talks about is inward and outward, inward and outward obligations, and they unpack that in paragraph two of chapter 26 of the Confession, the second paragraph of chapter 26, which is on communion, or of communion of the saints. We read, saints by profession are bound to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification, as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities, which communion, as God offers opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, at every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus. So here the Puritans specified a little more carefully the idea of what they had in sharing, in sharing their gifts with one another, both outward, which would be the material concerns of our body, food and shelter

and the like, and, of course, inward would be the spiritual encouragement, and they unpack a little bit of both here in this second paragraph.

The three parts we see here are the spiritual service, the outward service, so it would be the inward service and the outward service, and then the faraway service is what I call it, the latter part, and every place who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, right? Not just your local community, anywhere. Spiritual service. The text they use, as we know, is Hebrews 10.24. Let us consider one another, in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much more, as you see the day approaching.

That's clearly a spiritual or inward manner in which we encourage one another to do the right thing, to have good works, to have love, and to assemble the saints together to worship and honor God. That spiritual service is the language that they use here, and paragraph one, they talk about inward. I would call this the inward part, although part of it's outward, so you've got to physically meet together and worship God, to encourage our inward gifts of faith and love and joy and the fruits of the spirit to be stirred up in public worship, as well as good works.

It's what it says, stir up like a pot of good soup, that we want to get to the good meats there, in order that each of us would love and do good works, and to assemble in public honor of our God. It's a compact and very precise way of speaking. Let us consider one another.

Think about one another. One of these passages, this is the one, the one another, in order to this purpose, to stir up love and good works, what, among one another, not just yourself, among one another, and not forsaking, as part of this good works, the assembling of ourselves. That's a calling and a duty that we can all do to encourage.

It's time to worship God. Let's go ahead and put our affairs in order, so that we can come together as God's people on his day. And it takes time, of course, like with our children, to teach.

And therefore, we endure, we persevere for them, for their sake, that they would learn to love to attend the worship of God, our Savior. And that's why we love them. And so this enduring, of course, is not a suffering.

Outward service that is taking care of the bodily needs. This, too, is part of our calling, especially of the poor. We'll run across this in some of my readings in the early church fathers and Sunday school class this coming week, in which they describe the saints, not only as those who sing psalms, who hear the word of God, who partake in bread and wine, but also give alms to the poor.

It's one of the distinguishing factors of the early church. Take care of one another, especially the poor among us. Acts 2.45 is that one passage that we know of.

And they sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all as anyone had need. And so continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to

house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart. And they were united with practice and worship, and they took care of one another, and they sold what they had.

As we know, in chapter 5 or 6, where one of them was killed, husband and wife were killed, for lying to the Holy Spirit. As a particular application, we see a detail of what it meant that they were selling what they had. They had extras, usually the rich.

They sold it off to give to the poor, but they lied here on how much they sold off. And so God killed them. But here, I want to emphasize again that they were taking care of one another, outward needs.

Now this is harder to do, of course, because it takes funds and money and resources. But it has and can be and should be done as best we are able. Through the diaconate, of course, formally.

It's through the diaconate. But that doesn't mean, of course, the deacons do it all and you don't get to do anything. Oh, great, the deacons take care of it.

If you can, you don't have to go through the church. You can take care of someone in need, even in our own midst. Although you may want to ask us first if we're aware of what's going on, because we can perhaps help or help you avoid a problem.

Because sometimes people dig themselves into a problem that way. But often, these things are done behind closed doors. We're not going to brag about it.

You shouldn't brag about it. I don't expect you to brag about it. I don't think I've ever heard anybody brag about it.

But this is what we are called. It's, in that sense, enduring. No one's going to remember what you did, what good works you did.

That's not the point. The point is you want to help. You want to persevere.

You want to bear one another's burdens. Helping people with rides, the doctor, with food and the like, all these little things, these are ways in which we do a hard day's work to help one another in the body of Christ to endure and to carry one another's burdens. And not just locally, either.

So it's not just outward, inward, but beyond what we see here. What do I call that? Faraway service, spiritual service or outward service and faraway service. As we are able, of course, in all matter, all other considerations are considered equal, we should be willing to help outside of our own local situation.

Acts 11, we read about this. Verse 29, then the disciples, each according to his ability, right, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

So the apostles got involved. The elders got involved. The disciples, by disciples, they don't mean capital DD.

They mean all the laymen, all of us got together. And as we were able, we gave a little here, gave what you could to the cause of those who needed, I think it was a drought in Judea. They weren't nearby.

It was from very faraway places. Again, showing the interconnectiveness, I would argue, an argument for Presbyterianism. Because part of that is you have to know the people.

I mean, you're going to pick any pastor, it's the hands of Paul and Barnabas, excuse me, Barnabas and Saul or Paul, that the elders of these various churches got together and they just pick some random guy in America and say, we trust you. Now, they have to already know each other. And of course, part of ordination is you've got to know the guy before you lay hands on him.

So the whole system assumes understanding, and I know you, and I have a relationship with you. And you're not just some random Christian. He's just a stranger who just says, I'm a Christian.

I'm just supposed to believe you? I don't think any of us here would do that. We'd just pick some pastor and give him money and say, I take your word for it. All kinds of scams go on today.

We've got to be very careful. And this is one way to be careful. You do it through the organs of the church.

I'm not saying you always have to, but this is one of the helpful ways of doing this. It could have been excess foodstuffs, clothing, whatever. We don't know, but they organized it and collected it for other Christians besides those in the local community.

And that's a good thing. Now, of course, it's hard to endure and to serve for each other and to carry one another's burdens if we don't have unity, if we have little unity, if we have nothing in common like a common church, a denomination, doctrine, practices. We are blessed here at Providence and our denomination, our tradition, in fact, to have such commonality because we write out and make it explicit in our confessions.

This is what we believe. We know exactly where the money's going. Not to a heretical group, for example, some fly-by-night church, but somebody reliable and has been around a while and there's a history there.

And it's a functional unity, of course, not just on paper. The Roman Catholic Church likes to brag how united they are and the Protestants are all divided in all these different denominations. Don't let that fool you.

The Roman Catholic Church has always been divided internally. They just hide it. They have large swaths of differences and groups like they used to have the Augustinian.

I think they probably still have the Augustinian monks and everyone else. And they just have their own variations of theology and practices. They don't tell you that.

We are called to endure, to bear with one another in the sense of Galatians 6, both in identifying with Christ and His Church, even if it means public humiliation, and through the hard work and service of using what we have to carry one another's burdens, brothers and sisters, to take the gifts the Spirit has granted us and do the hard work of exercising them for each other as we have opportunity. And I've seen that you have done this and I exhort you not to give up and let Satan tear you down and make you weary in doing well. But to endure, and if need be, in order to keep showing love to the saints of our Lord and Savior for their sake.

Let us pray. We are grateful, God, that how much you've indeed blessed us and given us the strength to endure in the best sense of the word, to persevere because we love the saints and love one another. Help us to that end, God, to keep this up, Lord, that we'll be example to others here in the body of Christ and outside the body of Christ insofar as we can help others as well, our Lord and Savior.

And give us wisdom in this regard, Lord, for one temptation could be to overextend ourselves. Our God, we only have so much time and resources and mental energies, in fact, and bodily ability. And so, God Almighty, may we accept our limitations and do what we can, always with a heart of love to you and to one another, we pray.

In your name alone, Jesus Christ, amen.