

Carefully Follow God's Truth

Let us turn to our Bibles to 2 Timothy chapter 3. 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 10. Let us listen attentively to the word of God. 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 10.

But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering love, perseverance. Let us pray. And in this simple sentence written so long ago, God, the pen of Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit to the young pastor Timothy, may we see an encouragement for us as well that we would carefully follow the doctrine of the word of God and the manner of life that you have presented for us as befitting of Christians.

May we do so, Lord, in the day and age in which, unfortunately, many Christians and churches don't want to be too careful about your word and about the practices therein. Our God, may we not be embarrassed but rather stand firm out of a heart of humility to be sure and to always follow these things carefully and indeed even with zeal because we love you for the love that you have bestowed upon us. We pray this by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen. In this verse, the apostle commends Timothy for following or what? Imitating. He obviously doesn't mean that in a physical sense but a moral sense.

The young pastor he specifies here was careful to do such, both as to doctrine and to, his words, manner of life. But other things as well. Paul mentions purpose, faith, long-suffering and the like.

In other words, another way to look at this is it's okay to follow men of God. You're not more godly by saying, well, I'm following Christ, I'm not following man. If you remember when I went through the book of Corinthians and the earlier chapters there, people were running around bragging saying, I was baptized by what, Peter? I was baptized by whom, Paul? And others even said, Christ! Wow, that's the super holy God.

And Paul, what? Condemned them all. That is, he berated them all, more precisely. He didn't condemn them to hell, but he disciplined them verbally saying, this is wrong.

You have such an arrogant attitude about this. That's obviously not what he means here. He means this in the best sense of the word.

Only to the extent that Paul was faithful to Christ, to that extent should Timothy follow him. That goes without saying. And the same is true for us.

He wrote as much elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 4. Therefore, I urge you, Paul writes in verse 16, imitate me. Well, should we imitate Christ? Well, yes. We have his words.

We have the gospels. But in this particular case, in Corinthians and here in 2 Timothy, Paul is speaking to those who met him in person. At least some of them did in Corinthians, and certainly Timothy did.

So they knew of his life. He's saying, follow my example, the best of my example, of course, not the worst. That's simply all he's doing.

And when this is the way we are as humans, this is the way we should be as Christians, it's okay to follow the example of others if they are godly examples. Because we need, because of our limitations of our flesh, concrete, visible things and people to help us and to motivate us. What does this look like? We're not given much detail here, of course, other than apparently a list that Paul has here for us.

And I'll mention the list a little bit. But how should we understand this list? I think Paul was not trying to give a systematic description of what it means to imitate or follow him, but a list of various virtues that were relevant to the circumstances, especially the latter part where he talks about long-suffering, perseverance. Why? Because of persecution, verse 11, affliction.

Which happened to me, Antioch, Achaem, Lystra, and he emphasizes here persecution and trials and hardships. So he had something in mind when he was going through this list here. And so, nevertheless, I think we can organize the list, as we can organize many things in life, in a two-fold manner.

Doctrine and practice. What you say and what you do. Right? What you say and what you do.

Teaching and practice. Or here, excuse me, my doctrine, verse 10, and what else? Manner of life. We would say lifestyle.

How he acts. How he presents himself. What he does or doesn't do.

And I put everything else within that latter category, manner of life, by purpose, faith, long-suffering, etc. Excuse me. Certainly Paul also taught many other such important virtues, but here he's just wanting to hone in on a few things that he thought was relevant to Timothy at the time.

Of course, especially things pertaining to persecution, afflictions and troubling, hardships and the like. And hence he mentions also long-suffering here and perseverance in verse 10. I've already preached about that a few weeks ago.

Persecution and how it's part of the Christian life. Hardship and how we're expected to bear such things by the grace of our Lord and Savior. Now I want to drill in more particularly here about what it means to be careful followers of godly doctrine and godly practice.

Carefully Follow Godly Doctrine

So the first point here, carefully following godly doctrine. This was written to Timothy. It was in Paul's mind.

He says it explicitly in his letters for this young pastor here and for his work as a minister over the church there. But it's also for you. To the extent that Paul is writing on things that are not unique to the pastorship, to ministers and parsons, to that extent it's relevant to you.

That's the simple rule of thumb going through the Bible when we read such texts. Clearly here when he commends him and he's thankful that Timothy is carefully following his doctrine, that should be true for all of us. We should want to be like Timothy as well and carefully follow godly, holy teachings of the word of the Lord.

So this is just as much for Timothy as it is for the rest of us. It's for all of us. It's not something unique as though, wow, you know, only pastors should be careful.

The rest of us, woohoo, we can do whatever we want. Great. People kind of live that way.

It's a strong temptation in the American scene it seems to me in Christian circles. I'll let the pastor do all the thinking and heavy lifting and I can just kind of coast through life. No, we're all called.

This is a moral command not uniquely for Timothy but for all of us. Carefully follow or follow closely is one translation for it to highlight here. It's used in 1 Timothy 4.6, this word.

If you instruct the brethren in these things, Paul writes, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of good doctrine which you have carefully followed. So he commended him in the first letter and here again in the second letter of Timothy's tenacity and keeping on doing the right thing which is to be careful and following good teaching and sound doctrine, which is indeed for all of us. The phrase here, the word follow closely, may suggest to our ears that Timothy was listening and reading Paul's words with concentration and interest only.

Thank you for taking notes, that's great. No, not like reading a good book and you put it down but rather implies that Timothy was learning and applying and believing and accepting the truth presented to him through the mouth or the pen of Paul and of course ultimately putting it into practice. His manner of life.

And thus here, carefully following, I think is easy to see another way of describing that is imitation, not slavishly like he does exactly everything and speaks everything exactly the same way Paul does but imitating the right things as appropriate to his situation as a pastor there or our situation today. Children imitate adults for example but they do it in a childish way, that is in their own way, I don't mean that in a derogatory way but they're like little adults sometimes but they can't do fully adult things but we want them to imitate us. The same thing between Christians we can't always exactly do the word for word or action by action imitation but the point being that the general course of life is enough to motivate us to want to do the right thing, that's the idea here.

Although of course Timothy's actions follow Paul's teaching, the text for Timothy to imitate him and these letters and the like, we can learn or relearn general truths as well as we follow the imitation of Paul or Timothy here ourselves or one another especially. We are

social creatures and following imitating one another is natural. The media doesn't talk that way of course, our advertisement doesn't ever since I was a little kid, all advertisement has been about how unique you are, you can do your own thing, you can do your own way but we don't, we are sensitive to social cues and pressure, some more than others of course and that's how God designed it, that we live in community and part of that living in community is following the example of one another, preferably good examples, godly examples, great examples, not bad examples.

We talk about peer pressure for example, I remember hearing about this in school when I was younger peer pressure bad, no, no there's godly peer pressure, we want godly peer pressure. Paul is pressing upon Timothy godly peer pressure, he's saying look, follow my example, do the right thing, here's some advice for you, listen to me is what he's saying, that's pressure isn't it? And a collection of people saying listen to us, we have good things to say, our warnings for you is good godly peer pressure. Imitate us, is another way of describing this.

We draw courage from good examples as well. Now, Paul here in the text he says carefully follow my doctrine and he just goes off on a list from there. Carefully following my manner of life, carefully following my purpose, carefully following my faith, lung suffering, etc.

Doctrine or teaching here of course I think is the gospel and God's will for the church as presented through the ministry of Paul. Manner of life of course is conduct or behavior and the rest as I mentioned in the intro are just ways of describing manner of life in particular. His purpose, we read here in verse 10, he just mentions purpose as probably his goals as a minister.

His faith would be what Paul believes or could be shorthand for his trust in Jesus Christ, his faith in Jesus. Sometimes the word faith, you might not be aware of this, in the New Testament is more of an objective idea of content, what is taught. We sometimes talk that way today.

What is your faith? Well my faith is Christianity or my faith is Presbyterianism. That's what we're referring to, not your own personal relationship to Jesus as such, but what do you confess? And that's probably the case here but not necessarily. And of course lung suffering, love, perseverance, I take these to be Paul's examples of the lung suffering he went through and the perseverance he went through of persecution, affliction and the like, verse 11 and 12 when he goes on to that topic.

And love, love for the saints, love for Christ and the like. But again, it's doctrine and practice I want to put these categories and use them for us. The question remains, however, how careful or how to be careful in very questions like that.

The first thing is prayer. Paul doesn't mention this here because every text doesn't say everything at once. We know in our hearts, we know from the rest of the Bible, prayer is important.

It's part of the Christian life. It's how we talk to God. When hearing the word, we need to pray.

When reading the Bible, we should have prayer to prepare our hearts, to prepare our minds to receive the truth therein. Timothy received and carefully imitated Paul partly because his life was a life of prayer as well. I think that should go without saying.

It softens our hearts as we pray for the Spirit to do such. It readies our minds. We always need the Spirit's truth and help.

Secondly, zeal for truth. Why would Timothy imitate and be careful to follow the teachings and practices of the apostles and Paul in particular, if he did not have some kind of zeal and desire, a strong hey, this is the right thing. I want to do it.

I want to believe it. I want to learn it. I think that's implied.

I can't imagine just kind of, well, I'm just carefully following it because I got nothing better to do in life. Oh hum, oh, I might as well. It's just this job.

I think there was some zeal there in the best sense of the word. When someone lies about us, we have a natural reflective offense about it. We're offended by that.

And that's good and proper as the situation warrants it. When they lie about our spouse and family, we're even more offended because they're close and dear to us. But what about God and Christ? I think Timothy was zealous for the honor of Christ and so he wanted to be careful in following not Paul's doctrine as though it was only his teaching, but it's the Spirit of God working through the apostles to the extent they spoke the truth, they were supposed to receive the truth.

And the same with pastors today and church leaders and parents as they speak the truth to their kids and the like. And we should receive such things with a zeal that we want to know the truth because the truth will set us free and learn more about Christ and his will for us in our lives. When I mean zeal, I don't mean foaming at the mouth.

You can have a quiet zeal, zealousness, zeal in your life, but at least it means taking God's revelation in Christ Jesus serious enough to be careful in handling the word of truth. And then thirdly, to pay attention is certainly one way, an important way, to be careful to imitate the truth to what you read and the like. And to pay attention behind that, like here on Sunday morning, means what? The night before you made a reasonable effort to get good sleep.

And if you can, hopefully have a nice quiet neighborhood. We didn't have one last night. And we had a bunch of loud, I don't know what it was.

I just heard like laughing like a bunch of teenagers or something. Didn't last long because I was jumped up out of bed, went to the window to give them a piece of my mind. I heard nothing.

They were gone. It was very quick. But it was enough to wake you up.

And so what I have to do, my way to pay attention is I have to grab some coffee. Whatever works for you. Short of sin.

You need to do, if you want to be careful in imitating the truths you hear and practices given to us by the word of God. Commentaries help. Matthew, I always recommend Matthew Henry.

I haven't read everything of Matthew Henry, so if you find something you disagree with, don't blame me. I'm not going to say everything I agree with him on it. But I haven't really found anything I disagree with so far.

Rightly dividing in particular is one way to be careful in imitating the truth of God's word. We have this in chapter 2, verse 15. Sounds like very careful language, doesn't it? Because it is.

I'll remind you that that particular word, the prefix is ortho. Like orthodontist. Right? Orthodoxy.

It means straight. Straight teaching. To teach accurately.

Or truly. That's what he's referring to there in chapter 2 in that famous passage to young Timothy. And again, yes, as a pastor, he has duties and responsibilities.

You don't have. But certainly, handling the word of God and being truthful to it and believing in it and teaching it is all our responsibility. You're not supposed to be haphazard in reading the Bible and quoting the Bible and applying the Bible.

But you too should be careful that it's straight and true teaching that you're giving to your kids and to one another as fellow Christians. Without deviation or human invention. Of course, for the preachers, they're supposed to follow the word of Christ carefully and they have some tools to do so in a way you don't have typically.

Such as the original languages. But as I hope you see, often preachers typically don't drill down into that. You don't need it.

A good translation is just that. Good enough. But we are supposed to be careful as we are able in our callings and vocations as Christians and where God has put us in life.

The Puritans were not only called the Puritans in a derisive sense, right? You guys are just all about purity. What is your problem? During that time period, Goody Two-Shoe came out. It was a little story.

And we've heard that phrase today, perhaps. That's kind of what they're saying when they call them Puritans. You're like a Goody Two-Shoe.

What's your problem? You're a bunch of arrogant you're better than me, what kind of a thing? But they were also called precisionists. They were also called precisionists. You guys are so precise.

Well, because it's the Word of God. It's holy and divine. It's His will for us.

If you have a letter from your spouse and they're across the sea and they're gone for weeks at a time you're very careful with that letter. If someone could draw a picture of your spouse and make him look like a clown, you'd take offense at it, wouldn't you? I hope so. All the more for the Word of God.

Divine words. And unfortunately, as you heard in my prayers in my experience, the churches in America are not very big on being ortho, straight and precise and careful. We're just told, you guys are just, what's your problem? You're too picky.

It's possible, I suppose, but my experience has been not enough pickiness, frankly. In the pulpit, or in the words, preaching, books a lot of sloppiness going on. It's not good.

It's not your job as a pastor, of course, to run these things down to be that careful as they're going to be careful, because partly you have a job, you have a life you're busy, and so you do as best you can. I'm not going to try to pressure you, some people do, I don't think that's good, to think somehow that you're just a minister in training of some sort. You're not.

But you do have a responsibility to keep to such teaching, to hear it, to take what you hear and look at the text and say, can I see it in the text? That's why you see me go verse by verse and sometimes word by word, to show you the flow of the argument and to root it into what Paul is driving at and how these words fit in that context, so that you can see I'm being transparent and not trying to pull a fast one on you. Speak orthodoxy. Speak straight teaching and truth, and of course practice it as well.

It's a duty of all believers, because you all have access to the word of God. You must find the straight teaching, of course find faithful churches, pastors and the like so you can be fed the truth and be good Bereans and take that, what you hear, and go to the Bible and say there it is or there it's not, or I have a question or we have a disagreement. You can't have disagreements, not everything spoken and believed have to be spoken and believed by all of us to be sure.

That your family is equipped therein as well, that they get good instruction. And again, it's not just the pastor. You as parents and fathers in particular, look over your children's instruction in the word of God.

And it shouldn't be just on Sunday. As you are able, you have family devotions. Go through Matthew and Henry again, as you go through the Bible, and go through the shorter catechism.

That's why the church gave it to us. They have the job, the pastors have the job to be experts in this and to give you what they can so that you can have it in bite size. And that's what the shorter catechism is.

And when you're done with the shorter catechism work your way to the larger catechism. And then the confession. And go through all the Bible texts if you can.

Because it's all written in the Bible. They didn't just make this stuff up. They offered it to us as a treasure so that we could imitate them as well, brothers and sisters, the Puritans of old.

To learn the truth and to meditate upon it as well through maturation, reflection, to listen with carefulness, to receive the truth and not reject it, to study on our own as we are able and to support orthodoxy, that is straight teaching in our own way. We must certainly find such teaching, support it in various and sundry ways. To be sure, I don't mean just give the pastor a bunch of money or something.

But pointing to others, to the truth and to churches that are preaching the truth and teaching the truth, standing for the teaching of Jesus without shame because they will look down upon you. Why are you so concerned about the Ten Commandments? Well, because it's in the Bible. It's part of His revelation.

Don't be embarrassed about that. Why are you so precise about who Christ is? Is He God or man? Who cares? As long as He just does something for you and you feel good about it. People think that way.

You know, I'm sorry. I'm careful because God is careful and He gave us a lot here. I mean, there's a lot of stuff here.

And I'm called to learn it and to embrace it and believe it and teach your children. One of the best ways to teach your children is by your own example, not just your words. And it's true for all of us.

We're like, I don't want your words, I want your actions. That's what I'm talking about here. And that leads us to the second point.

Carefully Follow Godly Practices

Carefully following godly practices or actions. Manner of life, we read in verse 10. Paul speaks of himself here.

Both to Paul's piety, that is he followed God's law, as well as more passively, his suffering for Jesus. That he went through persecution and afflictions for Him. And Timothy may have to go through it himself as well, or you may have to go through it.

It is good to go through the history of the church, the book of Acts, I preached through that as well. And reminding us, this is what our forefathers went through. Why do you think it could be anything different? You may, by God's blessing, of course.

It's His decision. Sometimes people go through life without much persecution. They can praise the Lord for that.

We shouldn't expect that. We should follow the examples that we have before us, or written down here, of history of old. Recalled in these imitations of the Apostle, of even

Timothy himself, of the saints of all the Christians of early church history who went to the lions.

Of our forefathers in the Reformation, who were mocked and ridiculed, lost their jobs, had to flee for their lives. But we also have one another here in this room to follow their examples. They are faithful in church attendance.

They are faithful in reading the Word of God. They are faithful to admonish one another, or encourage one another. Or whatever it is you see in, amongst Christians here, or in other churches, or in your life outside the church.

You can imitate that as well. Concrete living examples. That's how God designed us.

We have eyes. We want to see something. We want to react to it.

Hopefully in a good sense of, I want to do that. That's a good thing. That's a good example for me to follow.

I need to follow that and do the right thing. That's what we're speaking of here. What I'm speaking of here.

Carefully following godly practices as well. Imitating and following one another. I want to speak of generally godly practices in general.

For example, your doctrine may often be more precise than your practice. That's my way of describing it. I don't mean that you're a hypocrite.

Something perhaps a little closer to inconsistent or disagreements or a variety. We speak of the category of Christian liberty, right? In Romans, in 1 Corinthians. That's what I'm referring to.

There's some Christian liberties. We're going to have some differences in how we actually apply some things in the Christian life. Our application may differ.

Our circumstances may differ. Our strengths and weaknesses as believers may differ. And so things will look differently.

For example, you and your family may have weaknesses. Others do not. This looks differently in how you apply the Lord's day with respect to the night before, for example.

You may shut everything down after dinner. Say, okay, everything's turned off. We're shutting the world out so that we can relax and calm down the night before Sunday so we're not wound up in the morning or at night before we go to bed.

And others don't. They're just like, okay, we're done. We turn everything off.

We'll go to bed in 30 minutes. Whatever. That's between you and God.

The same is true for churches, congregations of the saints. Some have a different order of worship. Others have longer or shorter prayers, more prayers.

I don't think that's enough to have serious concerns and say, well, you're not very careful compared to our church. It's just different. We're going to have some differences there.

That's my point. Let's not go down the wrong path here of absolutizing all the particulars of our life and saying, we've got it all. And the rest of you guys, what's your problem? You're not careful enough.

That's not what I'm saying. The Ten Commandments in general as well. We ought to know the Ten Commandments.

We just found Mardel's I think is closing. It's a Christian bookstore in South Denver. Yeah, I saw some eyes looking up.

That's what I was told by one of the workers. They're having a big sale. But not everything.

Only some things. It's really inconsistent and weird. Maybe they're not closing.

But we found some bookmarkers. Found a bunch of bookmarkers. 75% off.

Not for ourselves. It's for the kids. It's for the kids.

And one of the ones I saw was a Ten Commandments bookmarker. I was like, that's a good idea. Again, whatever works for you and your kids and your family that helps learn the truths of the Word and therefore to apply them.

Because certainly the Ten Commandments are not about simply doctrine. Memorize them. That's good.

They clear a bunch of do's and don'ts. They're about actions or inactions as we are called. Practice them, of course, at home, at work, and elsewhere.

Maintain others who practice them as well for you and your family. Be open to correction by the Spirit of God. We are called to admonish one another and carry one of those burdens in Galatians 6.1 and following.

But in all such things be judged by the Word of God. And of course, not just the Ten Commandments, but the Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Do we know the good news? Do we know why we have the good news? Do we know of our own sins? Transgressions of the holy law of God? This is why we need Jesus Christ and His blood shed for us.

Paul doesn't mention Christ here. He just mentions doctrine. But clearly we know his doctrine includes Jesus Christ and the good news that He saves sinners.

I want to go into some particular practices here. I'm not going to go through the Ten Commandments. I want to mention here with respect to the church.

Because the context is, of course, the super pastor I call the apostles talking to one of the ordinary pastors, Timothy, and encouraging him and directing him in his ministry. Church unity. Ephesians 4.3 We are called to endeavor or endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

He commends the churches at Ephesus to keep on endeavoring. Work hard at keeping unity in the Spirit in the bond of peace. Not friction and fighting like we see in the churches of Corinth.

Rather a settledness and a peace of the Spirit that we all have. Paul strove for this. Paul was precise.

Paul was careful in what he did and who he disciplined and under what conditions. The book of Galatians is pretty clear about that. He hammers them home saying you have a wrong view of justification.

He was careful and precise. And yet he still strove for peace in the church and unity of the Spirit. Let us follow his example and the example of our forefathers who strived to have unity not only within individual churches but as Presbyterians we believe in unity between churches.

So much unity and peace that we can say we have a Presbyterian, a regional meeting of the church leaders that has some binding authority when they make decisions on judicial matters and other things related to the health of the collection of churches in that region. And supporting the church of course. Praying for churches to be true to God's word, careful to that word in both law and gospel.

Not just their own particular church but the churches around them. I pray as you hear now and then to other churches outside the Reformed tradition that they would stand firm upon God's word and not be embarrassed about what he has to say. Another type of encouragement and prayer of support is that the churches would be precise and careful in doctrine and practice and that we would verbally encourage them that way as we are able or fellow Christians or church leaders if we have access to them.

And for yourself not to be embarrassed, I mentioned this before, of being careful and precise. You have 33 chapters in your confession? That's crazy! My response is usually, it's a big Bible, 33 chapters, that's nothing. But people think you're crazy.

Why so much precision? Why so much detail? Why so much carefulness? Don't be embarrassed of that. We're called to be careful. To be as precise as we are able with God's word and truth.

Lastly, perfection will not be achieved. You trying to be careful, you shouldn't try to be careful because you're trying to save yourself. There is a carefulness that's the wrong kind of carefulness.

I've got to be precise in everything because God's watching and I'll go to hell and then I'll get it just right. That's not what he's talking about here. The context is clearly a man who trusts in Jesus Christ for his redemption, his salvation, his justification, his sanctification, his adoption.

Out of love and desire because he is the child of God, to handle his truth just as much as you handle the good reputation of your family and your own name carefully. We should handle all the more God's good name here in the word of God. That's all I mean and that's all I'm talking about and that's all Paul's talking about.

The Lord is gracious nevertheless and will cover our sins because we will fall short. You will fall short. You will not be careful when you should be careful.

Both in doctrine and practice. Hebrews 6.10 we read, For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward his name, in that you have ministered to the saints and do minister. So here in the midst of the book of Hebrews, which is about Christ fulfilling the Old Testament ceremonial system, the temple's gone, the priesthood's gone, the altar's gone, he talks about good works.

And you ask yourself, at least I ask myself and have, what is Paul talking about? For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love. Whatever work or labor of love they had certainly was blemished with sin. They're not perfect.

And yet God, what, received it anyways because of the merits of Jesus Christ. Not that it would save them but rather he blesses their efforts in spite of their sins as a father does for a little child who just stumbles when he tries to clean his room. That's what we have here.

Our duty is to get up after our failures, to repent and keep walking forward, brothers and sisters, and try to be careful in our doctrine and manner of life. And we can by his spirit who strengthens us. And may we encourage each other in the Lord in this manner, I pray.

Let us go before him with our prayer and adoration. We thank you God almighty for your word, for this truth that you mentioned more than once through the pen of Paul. We are called to be careful with your truth and careful with our practices in the Christian life in such a manner, God I pray, that it is not out of fear and trepidation but out of love and a desire to handle your truth and your practices to be a good example to the world and to one another.

May we continue to do these things by the blood of Christ we pray. Amen.