

Obedience and Faith

Call To Obedience

Christ was completely obedient to the Father and Paul was obedient to Christ. In our study passage found in 2 Timothy, chapter 3, beginning in verse 10 Paul now calls Timothy and God's people to be obedient to his teaching in the living out of their lives, for this will bring them closer to Christ and help them stand for truth in a fallen world. With this in mind let us begin to see what Paul wants us to understand, reading at verse 10, "You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹ my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch (an·tee·okh·i·ah), at Iconium (ee·kon·ee·on), and at Lystra (loos·trah) —which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. (2 Timothy 3:10-11 ESV) Being obedient to Paul's teachings and his life example brings people into obedience with Christ and the Father. As a pastor, Paul calls for me to be obedient to study his writings, inspired by God. I am both to teach and live what I study. Obedience is an easy concept to understand but a difficult one to live because of our sin nature. This is especially true when obedience is inconvenient. Paul gives us an example of a life lived in obedience to the calling of Christ and it was a life that was mostly not convenient. True unquestioning obedience is seen in Paul's life and reminds me of a simple story told by Neil Marten a member of the British Parliament. In the 1980s Neil gave a group of his constituents a guided tour of the Houses of Parliament. During the course of their visit, the group happened to meet Lord Quintin Hailsham, the Lord Chancellor, who is second in authority only to the Prime Minister. Lord Hailsham was wearing all the regalia of his office; wig, gold embroidered robe and emblem of the Lord Chancellor. Hailsham recognized Neil Marten standing on the

other side of the group; he raised his hand and cried out, “Neil!” The group of visitors not daring to question or disobey the “command,” of the Lord Chancellor promptly fell to their knees and kneeled! Oh, my brothers and sisters in Christ, would it be that we were so obedient to our Lord and Savior’s every command! Paul was such a man and a model for us to pattern ourselves after.

Paul was a man of many talents, an educated Pharisee, persecutor of the people of the Way before converting to a believer in Christ and His obedient servant. As Christ’s servant Paul became a missionary, preacher, discipler and teacher. Paul’s greatest gift was that of teaching. God revealed through Paul’s teachings His blessing of bringing people into relationship with Himself through Christ. I observe there were three driving forces in Paul’s life; to know Christ as fully as possible, to defend Christ and His Scriptures as true and to minister to others by teaching Christ’s gospel. Paul would give his life to accomplish these three life purposes. Our lives are greatly enriched by his example of obedience and dedication. Should not every Christian strive to know Christ as fully as possible, defend Christ and His Scriptures as true and minister to others by teaching the gospel? I think this is right and true, Paul thought so and this is the command of Christ to everyone who believes in Him as God. Let me ask, whose life will be enriched by your dedication and obedience to Christ and the Scripture?

This is what Paul was speaking about in chapter 2, the importance of teaching and discipling others in order to pass on the true Word of God. Paul wrote to Timothy and the men of the churches in Ephesus, look back at chapter 2 of 2 Timothy, verse 1, “Be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, ² and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:1–2) The Bible is the never changing truth of God and each generation must wrestle with it as they study God’s Word. They must take God’s words into their minds and souls and let these words feed their souls and

minds with His life saving truth. As one is obedient day-by-day God grows in them a heart after His own heart and the Holy Spirit is given more and more control over that faithful life. It is this that builds within soul the strength of faithfulness that finds peace even in persecution. As Paul instructs in verse 10, “*You Timothy, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness,* ¹¹ *my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me ...*” Paul is saying, because of this Timothy, you will know the love of Christ in the midst of persecution for I have shown you the way. If we follow Paul’s teaching, conduct and his pattern of life, we will experience faith, patience, love and steadfastness in the midst of persecution.

Living In Obedience

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German Lutheran pastor and anti-Nazi dissident was placed in a concentration camp during World War II. While Dietrich Bonhoeffer was imprisoned he led prisoners in prayer and in singing hymns and taught them the gospel. He said, “*One act of obedience is better than one hundred sermons.*” During his imprisonment and by faithful obedience to Christ he helped lead a number of men to know Christ as their Savior. Dietrich, like the apostle Paul, remained faithful to Christ throughout his imprisonment and was hung about 10 days before the Allied troops liberated the camp. The German officer in charge hated Dietrich for his defiance to the Nazi war machine and for his faith and obedience to share the gospel. As Dietrich was being lead to the gallows the officer said, with a smile on his face, “So you have come to the end.” In which, Dietrich replied, “For me it is the beginning, but for you it will be the end if you do not find Christ.” Dietrich then walked boldly without fear to the gallows. His demonstration of true faith lived verses the unsaved lies of the world is still true today for both those who believe in Christ and for those who do not.

Paul wrote to Timothy and the men of the churches in Ephesus, he wrote to people throughout history, he wrote to Dietrich and he wrote to us, “You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness,¹¹ my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium (ee·kon·ee·on), and at Lystra (loos·trah) —which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” (2 Timothy 3:10-13) The Lord rescued Paul from many trials and Paul’s life and his death glorified Christ and his life has impacted generation upon generation for the cause of Christ. There have been many saints since Paul through the generations who have paid for their faith and obedience to Christ with their lives. They are examples of how we are to live. We are to be a faithful people to Christ while living in a world that lacks truth. Paul wrote that the world is adrift without Christ. It is those who have power and influence of the world and under the prince of the world that Paul said are “evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” Do we not see much of what is happening in the world is going from bad to worse? The evil one deceives those who are in charge of the world’s societies and they in turn deceive those they have power or influence over.

Unless there is revival in a society, a turning back to God, that society will become more corrupt and collapse under the weight of its own sin. This is the story of societies and world powers that has repeated itself from the beginning of history. In the midst of the rise and fall of societies the remnant church is to be the standard of Christ, living holy and praying for revival. By our faithful obedience God will use us so some will come to Christ and be saved. We also know we will be an offense to the unsaved and the world will indeed persecute us. Paul knew the price and was willing to pay the price of faith for his salvation and to be example to others.

Bonhoeffer knew the price of being faithful to Christ and was obedient.

On Dec. 4, 1893, Walter Gowans and Rowland Bingham both of Toronto, Canada, and Thomas Kent of Buffalo, N.Y., landed at Lagos, Nigeria. Their aim was to establish a witness among the 60 million people of what was then commonly known as the Sudan, the area south of the Sahara between the Niger and the Nile rivers. Gowans and Kent died in the first few months. Rowland Bingham returned with the personal belongings of Walter and Thomas. When he arrived at the home of Walter's mother his heart was heavy. Mrs. Gowans met Rowland with a smile and said, "Well, Mr. Bingham, I would rather have had Walter go out to the Sudan and die there, all alone, than have him home today, disobeying his Lord." She understood it is better to be obedient to Christ and die as a faithful servant than to be disobedient and live in safety. Her inspiration led to Rowland returning to the Sudan. He failed twice more and then on his third attempt things came together and one of the largest mission agencies in North Africa took root. Hundreds of churches and thousands of people are now followers of Christ and are in the kingdom. By obedience and faith we move forward, never giving up, never surrendering, living our faith in Christ. These men understood, along with apostle Paul and Dietrich and many unnamed others, that you cannot lift people higher than the standards you yourself live. If one is not living for Christ and is not walking with Christ, then they cannot be a blessing to other people in Christ's name. Christ does not give His power to those who claim Him but live disobedient lives.

Faith Found In Obedience

God has a calling for every believer, for me and each of you. Whether that calling is to be here or to go to the lost in another land. Whether God's calling is to impact the people you work with in your job or your neighbors or your family and relatives or to go to the ends of the earth. The point Paul is making is that each believer must

listen to God and know what they are being called to be and to do and how God will use them to advance His kingdom. We are to be people of action, action based on obedience and faith. As people live out their faith, Christ will bring His vision for their lives and the lives of the people He places in ones path into clarity. Each person is to have an impact for God's kingdom, impacting people for Christ, where God has called them and placed them. The world is lost and while there is yet time, we must act for mankind's only hope is found in Christ.

Paul wrote to Timothy, “You, however, have followed ... ¹¹ my persecutions and sufferings ... which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.”

Timothy was with Paul in Antioch and Iconium and his hometown was Lystra.

Timothy witnessed Paul miraculous rescues from many of these persecutions. Paul is saying you know what I write is true, despite persecution, my son, Timothy, live your life boldly for Christ. This is Paul's charge for us today. Paul continues in verse 12, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be

persecuted.” My beloved, if to some extent you are not experiencing persecution and the hatred from the world, if you are not despised by those who hate

Christianity, you may very well question whether or not you are modeling Christ.

Disobedient believers are of little threat to Satan. The world is in the birth pains

preparing for the delivery of God's final judgment. Jesus said, “When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.” (Mark 13:7–8) The world continues to rebel against the only

Holy God and His Son, Jesus Christ and its doom and final judgment will not be

delayed. I am torn in my prayers. I pray for revival and repentance and I pray for

the quickening of Christ's return and I pray for God's will be done and I most

importantly desire that I might understand His will. I know some Christians have

the idea the whole world can be converted and brought into a relationship with Christ. But, Scripture does not teach this, in fact it teaches the opposite. Jesus taught, “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”³⁷ For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.” (Matthew 24:36–37) In the days of Noah the world was destroyed and 8 were spared. Mankind had turned to violence and corruption and debauchery – just as it has this very day. As we continue on the collision course with the end of history there will be a greater and growing increase of rebellion against God and He calls us, you and me, to stand firm in our faith.

The world says, “Just do it” and “You have no limits” this attitude makes it ever more clear the importance of men and women’s need to studying the Bible and discipling others and passing on the truth of God from generation to generation. The remnant church will be offensive even to many who call themselves “Christian.” Timothy was already dealing with this very problem. False teachers were working to move churches away from the worship of Christ alone. They lacked understanding that faith is found in Christ alone and we are saved by His grace alone. These false teachers taught that eternal truth is found in many things instead of what scriptures teach, that truth is found in God alone and His Word, the Bible alone.

Obedience Builds Faith

Timothy was taught the scriptures from childhood as Paul indicated in chapter 1 of 2 Timothy. Paul writes beginning at verse 14, “But as for you (*speaking of Timothy*), continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” What a blessing to be raised through childhood with God’s Word. I did not

know this blessing, but my children did from an early age once Joyce and I were saved and our grandchildren have had this blessing. Parents if you do not take the time and make the effort to place the truth of God into your children's hearts and minds you are robbing them of a great blessing. In proverbs we are instructed, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6) Having spiritual knowledge of the scriptures and training others in the way of the scriptures and life of Christ brings us to verses 16 and 17, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." The first thing that one must accept and believe is that "All Scripture is breathed out by God." The Bible belongs to God and is His gift to mankind. It has the power to change people and retool them to be able to live as children of the Living God. Without this belief the Bible is just another book with thoughts that can help mankind to live their lives a little better or slightly above the corruption of the world. This is good but so far from the mark of God. John wrote in the last book of the Bible, "... those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ ..." (Revelation 20:4) It is not ones ability to intellectually know the verses of the Bible, for even Satan knows them, but it is the ability to take God's words into ones heart and believe. This is a key element that sets Christianity apart from all other religions. Other religions have multiple books and they have books to explain their books, but as Christianity has one Book that contains the inspired words of God. We are to test everything in life by the Bible alone. Whatever belief is the new belief of society it is to be held up to the Bible and if it is not inline with the Bible it is wrong.

It is when we study the Bible and not just study but meditate upon God's words and not just stopping with meditation but seeking the Holy Spirit to give us the wisdom

to understand that the Bible opens as a flower in the sunshine to reveal its wisdom and purpose in our lives. It is in this light that God reveals that nothing apart from His Word brings everlasting life or is a good work.

It is the job of universities to teach and train people for their careers. William A. Ward, a mid-20th century university administrator known for his observations and writings concerning people's nature, said, "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires." Well preaching begins with telling and if it stops there it is mediocre. Better preaching explains the scriptures and how Christ changes ones life and applies God's Word to the living of ones life and then the preaching becomes good. A pastor can also demonstrate how Christ has changed his own life and intertwine this into his preaching and this can bring a superior result and if he inspires people to live more fully for Christ, well then that truly is great. My beloved each of you are able to be all these things without preaching from a pulpit by discipling others in the Scripture, explaining how through the Scripture and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit they change everything within you and how it will do so for them as well. As you teach and disciple others they will observe your life and see the demonstration of Christ's change in you heart and mind and even more importantly your very soul and this will inspire others to want to know Christ. They will see the fruit of your obedience creating a desire for them to know Christ not just as their Savior, which is good, but they will desire to know Him through study of His Word and prayer and meditation as their ruling Lord and this is the greatest of all purposes in life. This is what God calls each of us to be, a discipler of the Way of Christ and to pour ourselves into other people's lives. Mrs. Gowans taught her son, Walter, to be obedient to Christ. As she said of her son, "I would rather have had Walter go out to the Sudan and die there, all alone, than have him home today, disobeying his Lord." Disobedience to God's calling is nothing other than sin. Bonhoeffer knew his death

was but the door to eternal life with Christ, how could he not be obedient. This is the surety a believer has while journeying through this fallen world; obedience to Christ brings eternal life.

My beloved, the Bible and the Bible alone is the guide for every spirit-filled child of God that guides us how to live with the love, grace and mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As Paul believed and as I believe and I hope you believe, “[For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.](#)” (Philippians 1:21) Amen and amen!