

What do the Scriptures Claim about Themselves?

2 Timothy 3:10-17

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Sometimes life is pretty rough. A lot of you are experiencing that right now as I look around this room and see your faces. Some of you face challenging difficult work situations. Many have parenting concerns. Some of you have health problems that have gotten worse or have taken a lot out of you. Some of you have aging parents and wonder how much longer you will have with them. Some are in the early days of bereavement after the passing of a loved one. Some of you wonder about your marriage or your life direction. Maybe you're having a hard time adjusting to your school. Some of you have concerns no one knows about except God.

When life gets rough, it can test our faith. We may wonder where God is or what He's up to. We may be shaken or wonder if we can keep going. That is quite scary when we have little energy or we come to the end of our resources. Where do you turn when that happens to you? What do you do? Where is your support? Sometimes when we are going through rough times, we can forget about what God has done to bring us this far and His promises to keep us going.

That's what seems to have happened in the life of young pastor named Timothy. There were some people causing serious trouble in his church. They led others away from living a God honoring life. They had things wrong in their beliefs. And as sometimes happens in the ministry or positions of leadership, Timothy felt alone. On top of that, he had a personality that was not naturally brave. He came across as timid sometimes and maybe doubted his ability to face the problems before him. But the worst was yet to come. He had an excellent mentor who taught him so much about the Christian life and being a pastor. But this mentor was in prison. There were rumblings that he might actually die there. Timothy needed some encouragement.

His mentor, the apostle Paul, hears about the challenges facing Timothy. So Paul writes to Timothy in what turns out to be the very last letter we have from Paul. He would soon suffer execution. But before that happened, he provides reminders and promises from God that could keep Timothy going despite his troubles. Paul reminds Timothy of God's provisions to continue in his Christian life amidst difficult circumstances.

But we can apply this encouragement to our lives today. **Paul reminds us of God's provisions and promises to continue in the Christian life.** One of these provisions is the Scriptures. We've been talking about the Bible. We've asked "What view do we hold of it? Why do we need it? How did it come together?" Today, within Paul's encouragement to Timothy we ask the questions "what do the Scriptures say about themselves?"

If we are going to trust God's Word as a refuge in times of trouble, we need confidence in its reliability. But how do we gain that confidence? How can we answer the question "Is the Bible the reliable word of God?" One piece of the answer comes from what the Bible says about itself. I realize it is an unsatisfactory answer for many to say "the Bible is God's Word because the Bible says it's God's Word."

We don't usually accept the truth claims of someone just because they said so. If a cult leader comes to us and says, "I am Jesus and you must worship me." We would likely respond with "why should I believe you?" If they respond, "Because I said so," we would look for outside sources to evaluate the foundation of such a claim. But there are times when someone has a reputation for honesty and truth telling. So when they make a claim, we are more likely to weigh and consider it.

That's what we need to do with the Bible. We must not treat the Bible like a cult leader. If the Bible is God's Word, then it would be wise to consider what God says about His Word. John Piper puts it like this: "We are not the ones who initiated this interaction with the Bible. The Bible was there first. It was making claims for itself – and making claims on us – before we ever decide to engage with the Bible. God's word does not wait for us to give it permission to be God's Word. But if God says His Word is true, that's a good reason to believe it. No one is in a better position to know that God's word is true than God Himself." I agree. Please hear me. I am not going to argue that we can trust the Bible is God's Word solely because the Bible says it's God's Word. We will look at some other ways the Bible reveals itself as God's Word. But today we will consider a major claim that the Bible makes about the Scriptures.

So as we walk through God's provisions for Timothy and us to keep going in the Christian life and ministry, I pray you will be encouraged by what God provides and gain greater confidence in Scripture's reliability through its own words. So let's go to the text. 2 Timothy 3:10-17 – Page 844 in the Bibles in front of you.

2 Timothy 3:10-17 (ESV)

¹⁰You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.¹²Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵and 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. ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

What does God provide for Timothy?

First we see that **God provides good examples of Christian teaching and living.** In verse 10, Paul states “You, however, have followed all these important areas in my life. In contrast to those described in verses 1-9 of this chapter who followed evil ways, Timothy followed Paul’s example. The word translated “follow” does not just mean to walk behind. It means to trace out as an example or learn from his teaching. Each one of these virtues were very important in Paul’s Christian walk. Timothy could listen to and observe Paul’s teaching and way of life. Paul was a survivor. He endured life in the toughest trenches of the early church. So Timothy has this good example impressed upon his mind and life. Timothy also followed Paul’s aim in life or purpose. Paul’s faith serves as an example for Timothy to keep putting faith in the Lord. You know how sometimes everyone can be down about ministry or life going poorly. But then someone comes along with an enthusiastic faith reminding everyone of God’s faithfulness in the past and His trustworthiness for the future. Paul also lists his patience, love and steadfastness as examples Timothy has followed.

As we read verse 10, it might come across a little arrogant on Paul’s part to point to his own life as this great example. After all, aren’t we supposed to follow Jesus? Paul was a sinner. But Paul is about to die. He talks in the next chapter about the certainty of his death. So in this last letter to his protégé Timothy, he wants to bring to mind all that he imperfectly but consistently lived out before Timothy. If Timothy continued in this pattern, it would help him persevere. And as I prepared this passage, I couldn’t help but wonder if we would be willing to encourage those coming after us to follow our teaching, way of life, our resolve or faith? Would we want those who follow us to imitate our patience, love and steadfastness?

But we need to also remember who God has placed in our lives as good examples. If we’ve had Godly examples around us, we must thank God for His provision of them.

Paul goes on to remind Timothy of one of the harder realities in the Christian life. You have followed, verse 11, “my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra.” Paul reminds Timothy that the Christian life involves suffering. He thinks back to some of his earliest persecutions. In Antioch, Paul was received well, but then jealous Jews stirred up a mob that drove Paul and Barnabas out of the city. Then they spent considerable time in neighboring Iconium. But some Jews and Gentiles perceived them as a threat. So they gathered together in a plot to stone them. They leave and go to Lystra. Paul and Barnabas were initially welcomed as gods after they did a miracle. But

eventually the crowd turned on them. Paul is dragged out of the city and stoned. In fact, the crowd thought he was dead and left. But Christians gathered around him and he eventually gets up to go into the city. Can you imagine being stoned like that and left for dead? Yet there's an important connection between Paul and Timothy and that event. Timothy grew up in Lystra. He first shows up in Acts 16:1. He grew up under a Christian mother. We're told he was well spoken of by the Christians in Lystra. So it is possible Timothy was there the day Paul was stoned or certainly heard about it. Paul brings Timothy back to those difficult times to remind him the Christian life includes suffering for the faith.

But then he reminds Timothy of God's help in the midst of sufferings. Look at the second half of verse 11. "Yet from them all the Lord rescued me." This is the second provision of God that Paul reminds Timothy about. **God "delivers" His people out of all their persecutions.** I chose these words carefully. The ESV says "Yet from them the Lord rescued me." But your pew Bibles say in verse 11, "out of them all the Lord rescued me!" Both are accurate translations. But there's maybe a slight difference between being rescued from persecution or out of persecution. To be rescued from could be interpreted to mean the Lord came in and rescued Paul every time before he was be persecuted. But we know that didn't happen. God didn't come in to rescue Paul before the stones started flying in Lystra. Yet the Lord did rescue him from dying that time so persecution can be part of our lives.

This also shows us that "deliver" cannot mean never experience suffering. It must mean something more like the Lord will ultimately rescue Paul and us for His eternal purposes. After all, while writing these words Paul knows he's about to die. He's not going to be delivered from the death sentence. But he will be rescued out of death. In 2 Timothy 4:8, he is not hopeless. He declares "In the future, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge will award to me on that day." So even when facing death, Paul looks forward to an eternal rescue.

This reflection on God's rescuing work out persecutions cause Paul to give Timothy some tough but necessary teaching. Verse 12 – "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted while evil people and impostors go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." Everyone who wants to live a Godly life will be persecuted. It's kind of a litmus test or an x-ray that can reveal those living Godly lives. If we're not being persecuted for our faith, it may indicate we're not living Godly lives.

But I often wondered about this verse while growing up in Canada. Most Christians aren't arrested or physically persecuted for their faith here. But if you've ever tried to live a Godly life, you can receive a hostile response. Tim Keller

tells the story of a young man in his congregation who took a summer job in a company. The young man had been raised to work hard at whatever he was doing to the glory of God. So on his first day, he worked hard. On his second day, the permanent employees came to him and said, “Don’t work so hard – you are making us look bad. Slow down or else.”

Keller writes “Christians are to be the “light of the world” (Matthew 5:14), but light exposes and people do not want to be exposed. Simply living the way you should live can expose dishonesty in the office, racism in the neighborhood, gossip in your social circle, corruption in your government office. Just living with integrity will irritate many people. This is why simple goodness will attract hostility, just because it is good. Proverbs 29:10 states “The bloodthirsty hate a person of integrity and seek to kill the upright.” People hate a person of integrity. The wise person should not be surprised by this. We should expect this, because our Lord, who was the light who exposed the darkness got nothing less.” Everyone who desire to live Godly lives will be persecuted.

So far we’ve seen God provide Timothy with a good example that he could follow in his ministry and Christian walk. We’ve seen that the Lord rescues His people out of persecution and sufferings. Let’s turn now to God’s provision of His Word for Timothy.

Verse 14 – “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed knowing from whom you learned it.” So along with good examples, Timothy had good teachers. Earlier in 2 Timothy 1:4-5, we see that both his mother and grandmother had sincere faith. They likely taught him well.

But then verse 15 – “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.”

Now the sacred writings were most likely the Old Testament. We talked last week about the 39 writings that formed the Hebrew Scriptures which became our Old Testament. They were the Scriptures that Jesus and His disciples lived by. But notice what Paul writes about the sacred writings. “They are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” Is Paul saying that in reading only the Old Testament, Timothy could gain wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus?

God saved people through His Word in the Old Testament. But the Old Testament does not use the words “salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.” in Acts 8, an official from Ethiopia is reading the passage from Isaiah which talks about a suffering servant who is like a sheep led to the slaughter. A Christian named Philip walks beside the Ethiopian’s

chariot and hears the reading. Philip asks if the Ethiopian understands it. He answers “How can I unless someone guides me?” So Philip jumps into the chariot and explains that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. Then the Ethiopian becomes a Christian and is immediately baptized. So in that case, the Old Testament created the hunger but a Christian came along and guided the seeker to salvation through faith in Jesus.

Here Paul says “the sacred writings are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” If he only wrote “they are able to make you wise for salvation,” we might conclude that they point to a coming salvation. But he goes all the way in declaring salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Could it be that he is already recognize that the gospel message is part of the sacred writings? Could it be that he’s maybe aware of some of the apostle’s writings already in circulation? We’re not sure. But either way, Paul certainly attributes to the writings themselves some sort of ability. They can give wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

But then Paul writes one of the most important statements in Scripture about Scripture. Verse 16 – “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” Here is a great provision from God for Timothy and us.

God breathed out all Scripture so that we would have His Word for teaching and life. Some of your Bible translations might put verse 16 like this “All Scripture is inspired by God.” That is a good translation. But breathed out is closer to word Paul used here. In fact, this word is not found in any other Greek text, Biblical or otherwise prior to this letter. Some suggest Paul made a new word to describe God’s involvement in the Scriptures. Notice, he doesn’t write that the authors were inspired, although that is certainly true and found in Peter’s second letter. He states that “All Scripture is breathed out from God.” So Scripture claims that all of Scripture is breathed out by God.

Here is one of the clearest claims that Scripture comes from God. Remember Paul will never be able to speak to Timothy again. He is trying to encourage Timothy to keep going in ministry and the Christian life. So he impresses on Timothy that the Scriptures are no ordinary human writing that you should maybe consider consulting along with all the other good resources out there. This is God’s breathed out Word.

One area God has really been challenging me on over the past 6 months is my tendency to quickly turn to secondary sources after one quick read of His Word. By that I mean, we sometimes read more about what other people say about the Bible than we read the Bible. Other resources can be great and very helpful. It can be good in our Bible

Studies to follow someone else's discoveries. But what about spending more time in the Bible than in other sources? I recently heard of a Bible Study where the first half hour of the group's gathering is done in silence where everyone reads the portion of Scripture they're going to talk about. Then they share what they've seen or how God spoke to them in those minutes. Some of you are doing that in your groups. That's a pretty wise investment of time with God breathed Scripture.

"But the devotionals or the Bible Studies give us some practical insights. They help us with life today." Well notice Paul does not stop after he says "All Scripture is breathed out by God." The last half of verse 16 and all of verse 17 talk about the practical every day help Timothy could gain from Scripture. Paul says this breathed out Scripture is profitable for teaching and reproof. This refers to the teaching from God. Some Scriptures is profitable for teaching right doctrine. Some Scripture is profitable for reproofing or exposing wrong doctrine. This God breathed Scripture is also profitable for correction and training in righteousness. Both of these have to do with living. So some Scripture is profitable for correcting wrong living. And some Scripture is profitable for training in right living.

Therefore, if you are a pastor of a church and your job is teach right doctrine and expose false doctrine; and your job include shepherding the flock under your care with other leaders by correcting wrong behavior and training in right living, the God breathed Scripture is your ultimate resource. With it the man of God is complete. There is nothing lacking. He is equipped for every good work. If you are a leader in a ministry or responsible for some kids or leading your home or parenting your children, the God Breathed Scriptures are profitable to you for teaching right things about God and exposing wrong teaching. And it is profitable to help you correct wrong behavior and train in right behavior.

What does Scripture say about Scripture? Here Scriptures says "all Scripture is God breathed. This is just one example of several throughout the New Testament. It is profitable for you to gain God's perspective and live God's way in whatever you're going through right now. It's part of God's great provisions to keep going in the Christian life.

When Jesus was at his weakest physically after 40 days of fasting, the devil came to tempt him. Where did Jesus turn to defeat the devil's questions? Jesus solely used the Scriptures to answer every question. So this passage steels Timothy to be prepared for hardship. Yet he can continue in the ministry and faith because of God's provisions – good examples; the Lord's faithful deliverance of His people out of persecution and Scripture that comes from God's breath.

So now, I'd invite you to come before God with anything that troubles you or concerns you right now. Then will ask God to bring to mind something from His Word that He has to say to you? If nothing comes to mind, maybe after the service is done, you could talk to someone you know who has more experience in the Word who might be able to direct you to a place that will help. If you do not know Christ and have not received the salvation He promises, then you need to get into His Word. For it is able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.