

Sticking to the Gospel

2 Timothy 3:10-17

16 September 2018 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Question: How do we stop ourselves being sucked into false Christianity?

Big Idea: Keep following the trustworthy and godly influences you've learned from.

Introduction

I don't know why – I wasn't looking for it – but this week I received a number of invitations to make a lot of money.

I could've gone to a free seminar that promised to teach me how to get rich quick by investing in property.

I've never been to one, but I've been told that you get nothing for nothing and they're all about signing you up to their paid product.

These schemes are usually fakes; the only people who are getting rich quickly are the people running the seminars.

Which makes me wonder why, if their secret is so successful, they're spending their time flogging seminars in the first place, rather than sitting on a tropical beach.

In another example, I was invited to invest into Bitcoin.

Even though cryptocurrencies have tanked, I was promised that by starting with just \$250, I was guaranteed not to lose regardless of whether the market was going up or going down.

It even linked to a fake ABC site that showed the trusted voice of ABC's News 24, Virginia Trioli, making money using their scheme.

Of course, I knew it was a scam too, a clever ad designed to play on my greed.

But I have to admit that there was a brief moment when I considered it.

Most of us are probably familiar with these money-making scams and so we know how to spot them.

But the reason they keep popping up is because they work – there's always someone who falls for it.

The people who run these schemes prey on people who are vulnerable and can least afford it.

And it's not just through online invitations – probably the biggest scam can be found in every pub, club and RSL.

The real winners out of pokies are the people who put the machines in, not the people who put their money in.

But how good are we at avoiding religious scams?

In these last days, there are spiritual fakes doing the rounds, as we saw last week.

They go around peddling a poor cheap copy of Christianity, preventing people from coming to a knowledge of the truth, verse 7.

They're into bogus religion, not get rich quick schemes.

Actually, scrap that. Quite often they're exactly the same thing.

How is Timothy to live in these last days?

How can he stop himself from being sucked in?

How can he inoculate himself against these fakes and stop himself from veering away from the gospel?

And how can we do the same?

We'd like to think that we wouldn't fall for following after a religious scammer.

We'd like to think we wouldn't fall for an investment scam either, but many do.

I briefly paused to consider the bitcoin scam.

I know that a number of Christians have fallen for get rich quick schemes.

If that's anything to go by, we need to be careful of religious scams too.

Our passage this morning has some really well-known verses in it.

My guess is that many of you have probably heard a couple of them referred to in sermons a few times before.

For example, the verse about persecution, verse 12.

And the classic one about Scripture, verse 16.

But the heart of the passage is really found in verse 14:

2 Timothy 3:14 (NIV11) ¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of,

Or to put it another way, **keep following the trustworthy and godly influences you've learned from.**

Tim doesn't need a get spiritual quick scheme.

The fake teachers might think that they're progressives – always coming up with something new.

But faithfulness comes from sticking to the truth that you were convinced of first.

In fact, if you're offered something that's being flogged as newer and better, look the gift horse in the mouth.

It mightn't be full of Greeks, but it'll be full of fakes.

What exactly does that look like to follow trustworthy and godly influence?

How do you do that?

Paul gives Timothy – and us as well – two ways to avoid becoming like the fake Christians who are absorbed with themselves.

They both begin with the words “but you”.

- Follow Godly examples with a proven track record (vv10-13)
- Follow the Bible which equips God's people (vv14-17)

Follow Godly examples with a proven track record (vv10-13)

Paul compares Timothy with the fake Christians.

They are lovers of themselves (verse 2), without love for others (verse 3) and loving pleasure rather than lovers of God (verse 4).

They worm their way into homes, verse 6.

But you need to do things differently.

You need to follow Paul as a trustworthy and godly example.

Timothy doesn't just need to “know” about Paul's ministry, as the NIV has it.

A better translation is that he's to follow after his mentor, walking in his footsteps.

Paul's the alternative model to the fake Christianity that some people will follow in the last days.

To do that, Timmo needs to believe the same things that Paul himself believed.

Teaching is an important part of the Christian faith because what we believe matters.

It's no accident that it comes first, as it's the core of what Timothy needs to reproduce in his own life.

The Christian life isn't a Choose Your Own Adventure where you get to decide what's right and wrong.

It's important that Timothy has his beliefs grounded on the right content.

Only the true gospel saves.

But the Christian life is more than just knowing the right stuff.

Right belief affects right practice.

Our whole life – everything we do – will be shaped by the gospel.

My senior physics teacher at school was what you'd call a "very eccentric man".

His father was a dentist and by his own admission, playing with mercury from a young age had a lasting impact on him.

One of his idiosyncrasies was that he liked to impress on us the difference between a pupil and a student.

A student is responsible for their own learning.

And it was his belief that there should be a formal process for graduating from being a pupil to a student.

And it also just so happened that he thought he should only have to teach students and not pupils.

Timothy wasn't Paul's pupil. He wasn't even his student. He was a disciple.

In the ancient world, disciples didn't just go to teachers to learn knowledge.

They wanted to learn their teacher's whole way of life.

The disciple would follow the teacher around and live the same lifestyle – eating the same food, drinking the same beverages and doing the same activities.

Although I benefited from being a student of a brilliant physics teacher, I never would've wanted to be his disciple.

For a start, he had a reputation for having quite a short temper.

Nor would I want his theology because sadly, he was a Jehovah's Witness.

Timothy, however, followed Paul's whole way of life.

As a disciple of Paul, Timothy had seen his way of life up close, verse 10.

He knew his purpose and the way that shaped the decisions he made.

He'd witnessed Paul's faith in action.

In difficult situations, he'd seen the patience and endurance of a committed and godly man.

And he'd seen Paul's love – not the kind of self-gratifying love that motivates fake Christians – but the kind of self-sacrificial love that is willing to lay down his life for his friends.

Timothy knew every aspect of Paul's ministry, having travelled with him half-way around the known world as they shared the gospel.

It's fair to say that Timothy knew his ministry well.

Last week, we saw in verse 9 that the foolishness of the fakes will become self-evident to everyone.

Sooner or later, the cracks and the inconsistencies will show.

If Paul was dodgy, then Timothy would've had every chance to find out about it.

If his faith was bogus, then Timothy would've known.

A wise person once said that you can tell a lot about a man by what he says when he hits his finger with a hammer.

I'd like to point out that I actually wrote this bit before I hit my thumb with a hammer on Friday.

When your finger throbs with pain and the defences are down, that's when the true thoughts of our hearts come tumbling out.

Paul had been through a whole lot worse than hitting his finger with a hammer.

Tested through trials and persecution, Timothy had seen that Paul was the real deal.

Paul had experienced all kind of suffering, much of it at the hands of others.

Persecution was part of his story.

He specifically reminds Timothy of some of the things that happened – the events at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra.

Even the order that he mentions those cities matches up with what we know from Luke the Physician's historical account of Paul's ministry from the Acts of the Apostles.

But there's more to it than that.

In Acts 13, we read about how Paul and Barnabas went to the city of Pisidian Antioch.

They preached the gospel:

Acts 13:38–39 (NIV11) ³⁸ “Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. ³⁹ Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.

Many people were persuaded of the truth of the gospel... and it got right up the nose of some of the Jewish leaders.

Acts 13:50 (NIV11) ⁵⁰ But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.

When they got to Iconium, pretty much the same thing happened.

“[A] great number of Jews and Greeks believed”.¹

But there was a plot to mistreat and stone them, so they quickly moved on from that city as well.

When they came to Lystra, again Paul was preaching the gospel.

Some of the Jews from Antioch and Iconium turned up.²

They still weren't happy. They stoned Paul and left him for dead.

We know that Timothy came from the city of Lystra.

We don't know for sure, but it seems likely that he was converted to Christ when Paul brought the gospel to town on his first missionary journey.

Timothy was probably watching – not like Paul watching Stephen – when Paul was stoned to death.

If that was the case, he knew what this persecution was like from the view-point of an eye-witness.

Which means Timothy had also seen the miraculous rescues Paul had experienced.

As the disciples stood around Paul's battered body, the most amazing thing happened.

He got up.

It's so understated, isn't it?

Luke writes that he got up and walked into the city.

This kind of persecution wasn't peculiar and particular to Paul though.

And it's not just the apostles who'll face it.

Timothy must expect the same.

In fact, everyone who lives a godly life will be persecuted, verse 12:

2 Timothy 3:12 (NIV11) ¹² In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

Persecution isn't an optional extra.

Imagine there was a form you had to fill out a form to become a Christian.

If there was a section of “add-ons” at the end with a box for you to mark “persecution”, not many of us would tick it.

But we wouldn't have to.

If there was a form to fill out when we become a Christian, persecution would be under the "core expectations" section, with the box already ticked.

Godliness means that Christians are always going to live in tension with the world around us.

There's an inevitable clash between what Jesus says and what sinners want to do.

There have been times in history, in some places, where that gap between Christians and the world has been relatively small.

We're living in a time when that gap is growing, but it's always been there and it always will be.

That was the experience of Jesus himself.

People throughout history have been willing to accept Jesus as a good moral teacher.

What he taught is undoubtedly some of the wisest and most radical teaching that there's ever been.

So at first, he was welcomed by the people of Israel.

But his claims are big.

Jesus doesn't claim to be a good advice bureau, but as the son of God the Creator, he's the ruler of the whole world.

And he showed people how morally impure they are.

Which is why people in Jesus' own day didn't like what he had to say.

In fact, their animosity was so great that they wanted to get rid of him.

It was their hatred of his claims that sent Jesus to the cross.

People today really aren't any different.

If they didn't like Jesus' claims when he made them, don't be surprised when they don't like it when we repeat his words.

In John 15, Jesus said:

John 15:18–20 (NIV11) ¹⁸ "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.

Don't be surprised when you're opposed because of your faith in Jesus.

If you're in the world and of the world, then you won't face this same kind of pressure.

When you're saying exactly what everyone else is saying and tickling their ears, you're not going to be rejected, you're going to be accepted with open arms.

Persecution happens because we don't like our sin to be exposed.

I don't know if you've heard of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster?

They say it's "today's fastest growing carbohydrate-based religion."

It's a parody that's been set up by a group of atheists in an attempt to take the mickey out of faith, especially Christianity.

It's reasonably detailed but at the heart of it, they're trying to make the claim that Christians have no more evidence for God than they do of the Flying Spaghetti Monster.

"According to church founder Bobby Henderson, the universe and all life within it were created by a mystical and divine being: the Flying Spaghetti Monster."

You can get an ordination certificate for \$25 and an ID card that "licences" you with ministry credentials for \$15.

When you meet someone who claims to believe in the Flying Spaghetti monster and you say, "You don't really believe in that," I've had people push back and say, "Yes, I do."

You and I know that most of them are lying – and they do too – but they're trying to make the point that you can't argue against faith.

How can we prove that the Flying Spaghetti monster isn't real and how can you know that they don't really trust him?

However, I've never heard of a Member of the FSM church, a.k.a. a Pastafarian, who's willing to die for their faith in the Flying Spaghetti Monster.

It's one thing to make an argument, it's quite another to be willing to die for your beliefs.

But that's exactly what the apostles were willing to do.

They had faith in something, actually someone, that's much greater than death.

That's something that Christians have that no other religion has.

Timothy could trust Paul because of his track record of being willing to sacrifice his life for what he believed.

As he's gaoled, shamed in chains, he might not look like the example to follow.

But he's an example that's been tested.

And he's been shown to be trustworthy and genuine.

That's why Timothy should follow him, not because it's easy.

Was Paul saying that he was perfect and so he should be copied in every way?

Without a doubt he was a sinful man.

As Timothy seeks to follow Paul as a godly influence, that doesn't mean he's to become a clone of him.

Paul's saying the very same thing that he says to the Corinthians: follow me as I follow Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:1 (NIV11) ¹ Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Follow his example in so far as he is an example of Christ.

If you want the easy route follow the fake Christians.

They'll look like they're doing quite well for themselves.

But's it's get-godly-quick, religion lite, that leads away from the gospel.

In verse 13, he tells us that they're going from bad to worse.

This doesn't mean that as time goes on, the each fake will be worse than the one before them.

This generation might not necessarily be worse than the one before – history has ebbs and flows of ungodliness.

The point is that as time goes on, each individual will increase in their own ungodliness.

If you don't stick to the gospel, you'll descend further and further into ungodliess.

You don't just naturally wander into being more like Jesus.

And it's not just Paul who imitates Jesus.

Remember, as far as we know, 2 Timothy is the last letter that Paul wrote.

1 Corinthians is probably the first letter that he wrote.

Earlier in the letter, he tells the Corinthians that he's sending Timothy to them as a model of being faithful to the Lord.

Timothy imitated Paul, as Paul imitate Christ.

And the Corinthians were to imitate Timothy as he imitated Paul as he imitated Christ.

1 Corinthians 4:16–17 (NIV11) ¹⁶ Therefore I urge you to imitate me. ¹⁷ For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

And so, we follow both Paul and Timothy's example – even two thousand years later – as trustworthy and godly influences on our lives.

We do that by reading what they wrote in the letters in the Bible.

It's also good and wise to follow other godly and trustworthy influences.

Do you have someone who you follow, someone who mentors and disciples you in the Lord?

Who do you learn from? Who do you get real with? Whose life do you watch?

Have you found someone like that?

If not, it's a really great thing to do, to have a model that you can follow as they follow Christ?

And who follows you?

Do people look to you as someone who imitates Christ?

This isn't just something for the spiritual giants – the Pauls and Timothys of the world.

It's for every Christian.

It might be someone you work with.

It could be a friend at church.

Parents, for you, it certainly includes your kids.

You don't have to have arrived, you don't have to be Super Christian to imitate Christ to others.

You only have to be a little bit further along the journey of following Christ.

If you're in Year 12, you can show what it looks like to follow Christ to the Year 9s at Youth.

If you're newly married, you can show what it means like to be Christ to those who aren't married yet.

The most important question, though, isn't "Who follows you?"

It's "What do they see?" Or "Who do they see?"

Do they see Christ in you and the difference he makes in your life?

Following Jesus is more about dependence than perfection.

You'll be worth following if you're someone who models what it means, not to be perfect, but to be genuinely repentant.

You'll imitate Jesus if you're someone who is quick to forgive people.

Even from our brokenness, we're able to show others what it means to follow Jesus.

Discipleship doesn't normally happen in large groups.

You're not going to get a full insight into someone's life if you only see them on a Sunday morning.

It happens up close and personal, often one-on-one.

Because godliness often isn't taught, so much as caught.

Discipleship happens life-on-life.

So, actively seek out those people who model godliness and seek to be that person for others.

To stay on the gospel track, Timothy needs to follow trustworthy and godly people who exemplify Christ.

Follow the Bible which equips God's people (vv14-17)

In verse 14, Paul tells Timothy to stick with what he's known by following the people he knows to be godly, as we've already seen.

He goes on in verse 15 to add to that a second godly influence to follow: the Scriptures.

Follow the Bible which equips God's people.

Paul reminds Timothy of the foundation that his faith is built on.

The gospel message didn't come to him out of nowhere.

From the time he was a little boy, he was raised on the Holy Scriptures.

Remember, we saw back in 1:5 that both his mother and his grandmother had a sincere faith.

It seems that they taught him the Scriptures from the time he was little.

Is it just because of tradition that Paul tells Timothy to stick with this?

Blindly follow what you've always been taught without asking any questions?

Let's do a not application.

Paul isn't saying that we need to keep doing things the same old way because that's the way that they've always been done.

We need to continually be reforming.

That means continually contextualising, working out how the gospel interacts and connects with the world around us.

But what we teach and what we do must always be informed by the unchanging gospel.

Everything we do needs to be measured against the Bible.

Is it because reading the Bible will somehow make God do what we want?

Does it work like this: we do our bit by reading the Bible and he does his bit by doing what we want in return?

No, of course not.

We read the Bible because it's effective.

The Scriptures make you wise.

In particular, they make you wise for salvation, verse 15.

Only the Scriptures can show us as we really are and point us to Jesus – the solution of our sin problem.

The Scriptures are a mirror to our own souls.

They show us what God is like – his holiness, or complete “otherness”.

And they show his anger and disappointment at humanity's rebellion against him.

The Bible calls this sin.

Sin cuts us off from a holy God so that our relationship with him is broken.

But there's good news. The Bible also tells us how to be saved.

We can summarise that message like Paul does in verse 15.

It's through faith in Christ Jesus.

There is only one way to be rescued from the certain destruction that our sin deserves, and that's through faith in Jesus Christ.

Trusting in his death and resurrection on our behalf is the only way that we can be forgiven and our relationship with God restored.

The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster have their own bible.

Scientific American have described it as “[a]n elaborate spoof” according to a quote on their website.

But it never makes the claims the Bible does.

It doesn't offer us the hope that God has come to fix our greatest problem, like the Bible does.

It can't offer the kind of hope that changes lives now and our hope for the future.

Only the Bible does that.

When Paul talks about the Holy Scriptures here, he's obviously talking about what we call the Old Testament.

But how can you be saved from the Old Testament?

It's not until the New Testament that we meet Jesus.

Can books like Leviticus and Numbers really make us "wise for salvation through faith in Jesus?"

The Old Testament continually shows us that we can't be good enough by ourselves and we can't save ourselves.

However, it also reveals God's heart of mercy and grace.

The Old Testament offers us hope because of what God will do, specifically through his servant, the Messiah.

God's Messiah is Jesus.

Every page of Scripture points to him.

After Jesus rose from the dead, he met the two men on the road.

He explained to them how all the Scriptures point to himself.

To be saved, you need to trust the Lord, Jesus Christ.

The more controversial thing is actually the New Testament.

Can the New Testament be considered Scripture?

Paul thought that Jesus' words were Scripture.

For example, he quoted Jesus in his first letter to Timothy.³

What about the letters that Paul wrote? Should we treat them as Scripture?

It's true that Paul never claims that his own letters are Scripture.

However, Peter does.

Writing about what Paul had written, he says:

2 Peter 3:16 (NIV11) ¹⁶ He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

All of the 66 books of the Bible make us wise for salvation because they're "God-breathed".

What does that mean?

It means that the source is God's breath.

When you speak, it takes breath.

The word picture is a way of saying that Scripture is powerful because it's God's words.

We can say, "God says" when we read the Bible, even though he didn't actually write it down.

That doesn't mean that the human authors copied from God word-for-word like a human dictation machine.

But they were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

That's not actually as "out there" as it might first seem.

This week, I heard an author talking about getting inspiration to write from the world around her.

She sees something and it's clear inspiration for her to write.

The Biblical authors wrote under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

People have come up with all kinds of ways to try and describe what Scripture is.

You might've heard people say that we believe in the plenary, verbal inspiration of Scripture.

Others have preferred to us the word "inerrant" to describe the Bible.

The problem with all of these descriptions is that they all lack something.

They can all be misunderstood or misinterpreted.

Explaining exactly what the word "inerrant" took the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy ten pages to explain.

And did they get every nuance right then? Probably not.

Our doctrinal statement says that the Scriptures are "true, authoritative and sufficient".

That means that God's Word is trustworthy and reliable because it comes from God himself.

That's the heart of what it means to be God-breathed.

The Scriptures a trustworthy and godly influence that have great value in our lives.

They shape our belief and practice, creed and conduct.

They're useful for teaching us the content of our beliefs.

And it corrects our errors, or rebukes us.

The word there means to make straight.

God's word irons out the wrinkles in our thinking and realigns our thoughts with God's thought.

It corrects us when we're wrong.

That means that sometimes it'll be a difficult experience.

Sometimes reading the Scriptures will rip your heart out.

But it's a good thing because they'll also remake you and build you up again in godliness.

The Protestant Reformation regained the core conviction that we need to be people of the Word.

God's word is trustworthy and reliable.

It's the objective standard to measure what we believe and what we do against.

In the Bible, we hear God speak with certainty and clarity.

Now, this is when you're expecting a guilt trip about reading your Bible.

Reading your Bible is really, really important.

But there's not point guiltting you into reading it.

You need to read the Scriptures because you love them, because you want what they offer.

That's what will make you want to read the Bible.

A big part of our problem with Bible reading isn't actually reading it, the problem is that we don't really think that it'll make any difference.

Yet we know from experience that it draws us closer to the Lord when we hear from him regularly.

It will be a godly influence in our lives.

Reading the Bible doesn't just have the outcome of producing good people with good theology though.

It's useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

It equips us for every good work.

Reading the Word is what fills us up to be able to be sent out in the name of Jesus.

So that we're not just doing what we want, but what God has called us to do.

God's word is powerful.

In the letter to the Hebrews, it's described as a sharp sword.

Sharp and fine as a scalpel but with might and power.

The Scriptures are what God uses to make people wise for salvation.

In October, Scott's going to do some training with us to learn how to share this powerful word with others using a tool called The Word 1-2-1.

What's brilliant about this tool is that it's just the Bible – the gospel of John, in fact.

There's notes to help you to read the Bible with someone, but there's no questions or fancy diagrams.

The whole point is that you ask people to read the Word and let God speak to them.

Get to the training so that you can read the Bible with others too.

Timothy needs to follow the Bible to stop him from falling into error.

It's a trustworthy book that will draw him to Jesus.

It will make both himself and those he shares it with wise for salvation through faith in Jesus.

Conclusion

Friends, we need to stick with the gospel.

If you're out bush – and I realise that many of you have made it your life's aim for that to never happen – and your car breaks down, what do you do?

Many people walk off from their vehicle because they think that their best chance is to go looking for help elsewhere.

And often they die trying – they get lost, they run out of water or they're lost to the blazing sun.

The safest thing to do is stay with your vehicle.

There's a number of reasons for that – the vehicle will give you shade.

That's usually where you have the most water.

And the authorities can follow the vehicle tracks and it makes it easiest to spot you from the air.

When it comes to the gospel, we are constantly tempted to head off into uncharted territory.

We think we're going to find something more satisfying there.

There are many paths that lead to destruction.

Stick to what you have been convinced by, though.

Trust the godly influences that God's given us: people who imitate Jesus and the Scriptures.

They'll point you to the gospel.

Because the gospel is the only place where we can find joy and hope and peace.

¹ Acts 14:1

² Acts 14:18

³ 1 Timothy 5:18, quoting Luke 10:7

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Big Question: How do we stop ourselves being sucked into false Christianity?

Big Idea: Keep following the trustworthy and godly influences you've learned from.

Discussion Questions

1. How good do you think you are at spotting fake Christianity?
2. What's the difference between being a student and a disciple?
3. Why does persecution go hand-in-hand with being a Christian?
4. How does Timothy know that Paul is the real deal and not a fake?
5. How can we know today if someone today is the real deal?
6. Do you think it's wise to have a Christian mentor?
7. Do you have to be perfect to imitate Christ to others?
8. How does the Old Testament make us "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus"?
9. What does it mean that the Scriptures are "God-breathed"?
10. Do the Scriptures only influence what we believe?