

1i Timothy - Part 1 - Continue in the Gospel

by John Stott

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living in the last days with a gospel-centered perspective, recognizing the perilous times and the root of the trouble, and following the gospel solution to become fundamentally God-centered and loving the world and seeking to serve others.

Duration: 50:08

Scripture: Isaiah 57:20-21, Matthew 6:33, Ephesians 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:13, 2 Timothy 3:14, 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Topics: "Gospel"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of standing firm in the word of God and not being influenced by the world. He reminds Timothy of his past and present loyalty to the apostle Paul and urges him to continue in his teachings. The preacher then describes the conduct, religion, and beliefs of the bad men responsible for the challenges faced by the church. He also highlights the negative qualities exhibited by young people towards their parents, emphasizing the importance of honoring and obeying them. The sermon encourages listeners to remain faithful to God's teachings and to show gratitude in their lives.

Transcript

This is the third in a series of four Bible studies in 2nd Timothy, given by the Reverend John R. W. Stott at the 8th University Missionary Convention, held in the Assembly Hall at the University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, December 1967. We open our Bibles again at the second letter of Paul to Timothy, and we come today to Chapter 3. We entitled Chapter 1, The Charge to Guard the Gospel, Chapter 2, The Charge to Suffer for the Gospel, and we shall entitle Chapter 3, The Charge to Continue in the Gospel. Let me read you first the first verse.

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress, for men will be this, that, and the other. Now, there are three introductory points to notice about this verse which set the context for us. The first is that they have to do with what are called the last days.

And I want to assert that the last days are these days, the days in which we are living. It may seem natural, when you first look at this verse, to apply the last days to a future epoch, to the days immediately preceding the end, when Christ will come again. But biblical usage will not allow us to do this, because it is the conviction of the New Testament writers that the new age which was promised by the Old Testament arrived with Jesus Christ, and that with the coming of Jesus Christ, the old age had begun to pass away, and the last days had come.

For example, the Apostle Peter, on the day of Pentecost, quotes a prophecy of Joel, that in the last days, the same expression, God would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh. And Peter goes on to apply that prophecy to his own day. This, he says, is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.

So, in the conviction of the Apostle Peter, the last days, to which the prophecy of Joel referred, had come. They came with Jesus. Again, in Hebrews chapter 1, verse 1, we're told that God, who spoke in times past through the prophets to the fathers, has, in these last days, spoken unto us by His Son.

So, the last days are these days. We are living in the last days. The last days are the period that extends from the first coming to the second coming of Christ.

The inter-adventual period, the interim period in which you and I are living between the two comings of Jesus. What follows, therefore, in 2 Timothy 3, is a description of the present and not of the future. It is a description of the whole period elapsing between the comings of Christ.

Now, this period may get worse as the days pass, as he goes on to say, but already in Timothy's day, the last days had come. That's the first thing. The last days are these days.

Secondly, these last days will include perilous times, grievous times, times of stress. What we ought to know and understand about the last days is not that they will be uniformly and consistently perilous, but that they will include perilous seasons. And church history has amply confirmed that truth.

As the ship or the vessel of the Christian church put out to sea in the early days, it did not expect a smooth and untroubled passage, but rather storm and tempest and hurricane. Now, let me delay for a few moments on the Greek word that is used, perilous times. The Greek word is kalipos, and kalipos means hard or difficult.

And it means hard or difficult in one of two senses, either hard to bear, and in this sense it is used of any kind of pain, physical or mental, that is hard to endure, or it can mean hard to deal with, and therefore dangerous or menacing. It is used at the raging sea. It is used of wild animals that are perilous or dangerous animals.

And the only other New Testament occurrence of the word kalipos is with regard to the two Gadarene demoniacs, who, like wild beasts, we are told were so fierce that no one could pass that way. And so the Christian church, in these last days in which we live, is to expect seasons or periods that are both painful and perilous. Why? Well, that brings me to the third introductory point, the beginning of verse 2, because men will be this, that, and the other.

It is very important to grasp that it is men who are responsible for the menacing seasons which the church has to endure. Fallen men, evil men, men whose nature is perverted, men who are self-centered and godless, whose mind is hostile to God and to his laws, and who spread evil, heresy, dead religion, and persecution in the church. Now let's recap on what we have learned in the first verse.

Firstly, we are living in the last days. Christ ushered them in. Secondly, these days, these last days, will include perilous times.

And thirdly, these perilous times are the result of the activities of evil men. And Paul says, Timothy, you are to understand this, you are to know this quite clearly, and therefore to be prepared for it when it comes. Now the rest of the first paragraph, verses 2 to 9, is devoted to a portrayal of these bad men, these

men who are responsible for the perilous seasons through which the church has to pass.

And the Apostle Paul describes a. their conduct, b. their religion, for these bad men are religious, and c. their beliefs, a. their moral conduct. Now in the three verses that immediately follow, verses 2 to 4, 19 expressions are used. And it would, I think, be exceedingly tedious if I were now to attempt to analyse each of them separately.

But I want rather to pick out various things from the catalogue, and in particular to ask you to notice the first and the last of the 19 expressions. The first, in verse 2, says that men will be lovers of self. And the last, at the end of verse 4, says that they will not be lovers of God.

And that, in a few words, describes the conduct of these men. They are lovers of self instead of lovers of God. Indeed, four out of the 19 expressions are compounded with love, suggesting that what is fundamentally wrong with these men is that their love is misdirected.

They are lovers of self, they are lovers of money, they are lovers of pleasure, when what they ought to be is lovers of God. And in between these expressions come 15 others which are almost entirely descriptive of a breakdown of men's relationships with each other. But the men who are lovers of self and lovers of money are proud and arrogant.

And as a result of their pride and their arrogance, they are abusive of other people. But the higher our opinion is of ourselves, the more shall we be contemptuous and abusive of other people. Then I don't want you to miss the next five, which may be grouped together from the middle of verse 2, because they seem to refer to family life and especially the attitude of young people to their parents.

In the Greek they are all negative, seeming to stress the tragic absence of qualities which nature alone would lead us to expect. Let's look at these five. Disobedient to their parents.

Parents whom scripture says that children, during the years of their minority, are to honour and obey. Next, they are ungrateful, devoid of elementary gratitude. Next, they are unholy, and the Greek word is sometimes used in classical Greek, of a lack of filial respect.

Next, they are inhuman. They are utterly lacking in normal human affections, J.B. Phillips puts it. That is to say, they are heartless.

It is part of the natural created order that parents and children should love one another. But in these times of stress, they don't. They are inhuman.

And next, they are implacable or irreconcilable, so that young people are so in revolt against their parents, that they rebuff every attempt at reconciliation. They are not even willing to come to the conference table to negotiate. This relation, then, of children to parents, which the Apostle Paul describes, is one that is marked by disobedience, ingratitude, disrespect, lack of affection, and unreasonableness.

This is a mark of perilous seasons. The remaining seven expressions are wider than the family, and I will only mention them. Men will be slanderers, that is, back-biters or scandal-mongers, the sin of speaking evil of others behind their back.

Then there will be profligate, which describes people without any self-control. Next, they will be fierce, savage or brutal, haters of good, treacherous, a word that is used of the traitor Judas, reckless, whether in

word or deed, and swollen with conceit. So the list ends, as it began, with pride.

Now all this unsocial, antisocial behavior, this disobedient, ungrateful, disrespectful, inhuman, irreconcilable attitude to parents, this back-biting, this absence of restraint and gentleness and loyalty and prudence, is the inevitable consequence of a godless self-centeredness. God's order is that we should love him first, our neighbor next, and ourselves last. And if we reverse the order of the first and the third, and put self first and God last, then our neighbor in the middle is bound to suffer.

The root of the trouble in perilous times is that men are lovers of self. J.B. Phillips, they are utterly self-centered. And I tell you, my friends, that only the gospel has a radical solution to this universal problem of self-centeredness.

For only the gospel promises a new birth, a new creation, involving being turned inside out from self to unself. The gospel brings a real reorientation of mind and heart and life. And the gospel makes us fundamentally God-centered, when we have been fundamentally self-centered.

And when God is at the center of our lives, and we are fundamentally godly people, then of course we love the world that he loves. And we seek to give ourselves in sacrificial service to other people. And our attitude to our neighbor is only right when we have exchanged self-centeredness for God-centeredness.

So much of their moral conduct be their religious observance. Now, it may be a shock to discover that people like this, who have been described lacking the common decencies of civilized society, let alone God's laws, could be religious. But that is the case.

Verse 5, they are holding the form of religion but denying its power. And in the history of mankind, religion and morality have been more often divorced than married. The 7th and 8th century prophets B.C. fulminated against Israel and Judah for this very reason, that they divorced religion from morality.

Amos was the first. In the days of Amos, there was a boom in religion and a boom in injustice at the same time. Isaiah could say, or the Lord could say through Isaiah, your new moons and your appointed festivals, my soul hates.

They have become a burden to me. I'm weary of bearing them. When you spread forth your hands in religious devotion, I will hide my eyes from you.

Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen, for your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean.

Remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good.

Seek justice. Correct oppression. Defend the fatherless.

Plead for the widow. And Jesus said the same thing to the Pharisees. The religious people of his day, who nevertheless lived in immorality and injustice.

And so Paul says to Timothy, verse 5, that these people have a form of religion, but they deny its power. And there are many such in our own day who have preserved the outward form of religion. They put on their Sunday best to go to church.

They sing the hymns. They say the amen to the prayers and put money in the offering plate. They look and they sound egregiously pious.

But it is form without power, outward show without inward reality, piety without sincerity, religion without morals, and faith without works. And such religion is an abomination to God. And true religion is a combination of power and form.

Not power without form, nor form without power. But it is an inward reality that expresses itself through the lips and issues in moral conduct. See their intellectual beliefs.

It may be an astonishing thing that the kind of people Paul is describing, filled with godless self-love and malice, should not only profess religion, but should include some who actively propagate it. Verse 6, For among them are those who make their way into households and capture weak women burdened with sins and swayed by various impulses who will listen to anybody and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth. Now the proselytizing zeal of these people is portrayed as a military operation.

For the word for to capture in verse 6 means to take prisoner in war. But their method is not direct and open. It is furtive, secretive, and cunning.

They are sneaks, using no doubt the back door rather than the front. These tradesmen of heresy insinuated themselves into private homes. Choosing a time when the menfolk were out, presumably at work, they concentrated their attention upon women.

And their expedient, as Bishop Ellicott comments, was as old as the fall of man. For the serpent deceived Eve first. This was the method employed by the Gnostics in the 2nd and 3rd centuries and it has been by many religious commercial travelers since, including the Jehovah's Witnesses today.

The women who are worked upon are described in the Greek as gynaecaria, a diminutive which expresses contempt. For these weak women had a double weakness, moral and intellectual. Morally weak, they were burdened with sins and swayed by various impulses.

Weighed down by a load of guilt and carried away by strong temptation, the false teachers wormed their way into these households and played upon such weak women's feelings of guilt and of infirmity. But they were not only morally weak but intellectually weak. Verse 7. Mentally unstable, credulous, gullible, unable to arrive at any settled convictions, they would listen to anybody.

And such women, weak in character and in intellect, are an easy prey to door-to-door religious salesmen. And as an example of such false teachers, the Apostle mentions in verse 8 two men called Jannes and Jambres, the names according to Jewish tradition of the two chief magicians in Pharaoh's court at the time of the Exodus, wise men and sorcerers with their secret arts. Now I want you to notice very carefully what the Apostle Paul says here.

He says that as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men, the false teachers, oppose the truth, the truth that the Apostle Paul was teaching. Now what is remarkable about the analogy is not just that the Asian false teachers are likened to Egyptian magicians, but that Paul likens himself to Moses. Now Moses was the greatest figure of the Old Testament.

No prophet arose in the Old Testament in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. See, said the Lord, I make you Moses as God to Pharaoh, and you shall speak all that I command you. And for forty

years, Moses spoke with God's Word to the people.

Now Paul likens himself to Moses. As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, the false teachers opposed the truth that the Apostle Paul was teaching. So then whether it was Moses' law or Paul's gospel, it was God's truth, which men were rejecting.

Therefore, in verse 8, Paul rejects them as corrupt in their mind and counterfeit as to the faith. And Paul is very confident, verse 9, that they will not get very far. False teaching may spread like gangrene, but its success will be limited and temporary.

For their folly will be plain to all as the folly of Jannes and Jambres came to be evident also. Now let me pause a moment here. I think that you and I sometimes get distressed, rightly and understandably, by the many false teachers in and out of the Church who oppose the truth, and especially by the sly methods of backdoor religious traders.

But I want to say to you, we need have no fear. There is something patently spurious about heresy as there is something self-evidently true about the truth. Error may spread and become popular, it does, but it will not get very far.

For in the end, it is bound to be exposed and God is going to vindicate His own truth. Now before we come on to the second paragraph, let's look back at what we've learned so far. I think it is plain what these dangerous seasons are.

In the last days in which we live and how they arrive. It is because in that part of God's field, the world in which God has sown wheat, the devil has also sown tares. The devil has his fifth column actually in the Church.

Article 26 of our 39 articles of the Church of England says, in the visible Church, the evil is ever mingled with the good. And sometimes the evil have chief authority in the ministration of the Word and sacraments. Yes, in the Church, in the visible society of professing believers, there are men of immoral character and conduct, of purely external religiosity and of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith.

They are lovers of self, of money, of pleasure, rather than lovers of God and of their neighbor. They retain a form of godliness, but they deny its power and they oppose the truth and seek to win weak women to their pernicious views, morally, religiously, intellectually. They are perverse.

To my mind, it is a remarkably apt portrayal of what in our own day we call the permissive society, a society which genially tolerates every conceivable deviation, even in the Church, from Christian standards of righteousness and truth. And that brings us to the second part of the chapter, which begins, verse 10, But you, Timothy, are to be different. I pray that God will write upon the heart of every man and woman here those two little words, but you.

They come twice. Verse 10, But you have observed my teaching and conduct, not the ways of the world, but my teaching. And again, verse 14, But as for you, continue in what you've learned.

Timothy was not to catch the universal infection. Timothy was not to be carried away with the popular tide of the day. In contrast to these men all around him, in and out of the Church, Timothy was to be different.

And I tell you, my brethren, that every Christian is called to be different. We are not to be like reeds shaken with the wind, feebly bowing down before the wind of popular fashion and opinion from whatever direction the wind may blow. And certainly today the pressures that are put upon us to conform to the ways of the world are colossal, not only from the direct challenge to traditional views and traditional Christian standards, but from this insidious, pervasive atmosphere of secularism in which all of us are called to live and to work.

And many people all over the place are giving in, sometimes not even realizing what they're doing. But again and again and again in the Word of God, we are told not to be moved, not to be like reeds shaken with the wind, but to stand firm like a rock in a mountain torrent. Don't be conformed to the world.

Well, then, let's spend the rest of our time looking at these verses. Verse 10, But you have observed my teaching. Now here Paul reminds Timothy of his present position, his past and his present position, what Timothy has been doing and is still doing.

But you have followed my teaching. But then in verse 14, he says, as for you, continue in what you've learned. He goes on to the future.

So verses 10 to 13 describe Timothy's past and present loyalty to the Apostle Paul, while verses 14 to 17 urge him to remain loyal in the future. And the two main verbs in verses 10 and 14 sum up the gist of the section. Maybe you'd like to underline them in your Bible.

Verse 10, You have followed. Now I know the Revised Standard Version is observed, but the Greek means to follow. It is used literally of one man following another along the street, and it's used figuratively of one man following another man's teaching and taking another man's teaching as his standard and his rule.

So you have followed me. That's the word that describes what Timothy's done in the past. Then in verse 14, but you continue.

That's the second verb. Continue in what you've been doing. You have followed.

Now continue. Now we'll look into this a little more fully. First, verses 10 to 13, Timothy, you have followed my teaching, etc.

That means in a word that Timothy has been a loyal disciple of Paul, the Apostle. Timothy has taken pains to grasp the meaning of the Apostle's teaching and he has made it his own. He has absorbed it.

He has digested it. And now he is conforming his mind and his life to it. He has observed and followed the Apostle's manner of life and teaching.

So in mind and conduct, he has been and he still was Paul's faithful follower. Now are we clear? The contrast that is given us here with the first paragraph. In the first paragraph, the men there portrayed were also followers.

But what were they following? They were following their own inclinations. They were lovers of self, lovers of pleasure, lovers of money. But Timothy was different.

He was not following his own ideas, his own inclinations. He was not a subjectivist. He was following the teaching of the Apostle Paul.

He had an objective standard which he was following. Then Paul goes on to list his virtues and his sufferings. You followed my teaching and my conduct, my purpose, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, and you followed my persecutions and my sufferings.

Now you may say, what a boaster Paul was. Fancy blowing his own trumpet like that. Isn't he more than a little conceited in parading and listing his virtues and his sufferings? All very well to say, Timothy, you followed my doctrine, my teaching, but why does he go on and say, you followed my virtuous life, my holy life, and my sufferings? I'll tell you the answer.

It is because holy living and suffering are two of the chief proofs of a man's genuineness in what he preaches. When a man is teaching something but is living an unholy life and is not prepared to suffer for it, you may be sure that he does not believe what he teaches and his teaching is not true. But when a man not only teaches but his teaching is used in a holy life and he is so convinced about it that he is prepared to suffer and to die for it, then you may begin to be sure that what he is teaching is true.

Holiness and suffering are the two things that authenticated Paul's message. Then he goes on in 12 and 13 to say that everybody who lives a godly life is going to suffer persecution. So that's the position of Timothy in the past and the present.

You have followed my doctrine. You have been a disciple of mine. You have not been like the prevailing world and following the popular notions of the day.

You have followed me. And Paul expected that. He was an apostle of Jesus Christ.

And then we come now in the remaining verses, verses 14 to 17, to the future. And again Paul says, now as for you, it's exactly the same words in the Greek and they're very emphatic. You, Timothy, never mind about these evil men, verse 13, who go on, who advance, although it's a strange kind of advance because it's from bad to worse and not from good to better.

In contrast to these men who are advancing from bad to worse and are impostors, deceiving and being deceived, as for you, Timothy, continue. Now do let's get hold of that. There is a deliberate contrast between the evil men who are advancing and Timothy who is to abide, to continue.

I long that everybody here will get this message. The Church is full of innovators today. The Church is full of men and women who pride themselves on being progressive thinkers.

They are advanced thinkers. They're not content with the Scripture. They want to go on beyond it.

We can't fossilize our doctrines in the first century, they say. We are advanced. We have a new Christianity.

We have a fortnightly journal in our own country which is entitled The New Christian. We have a new Christianity. We have a new theology.

We have a new orthodoxy. We have a new morality. We have a new Reformation.

They want to advance and to produce something new. And the Apostle Paul says, don't you go on. You'll be like these evil men and impostors who go on.

Timothy, as for you, abide. Abide. Continue in the things that you've learned and heard.

And as for this new theology and morality, perhaps we may be forgiven if borrowing the words of Jesus, we prefer to say that no one, after drinking old wine, desires new. For he says, the old is better. And so, verse 14, he says to Timothy that he has learned certain things from Paul and that he has come firmly to believe them and now he is to abide in what he's learned and believed.

And he is not to let any man shift him from his ground. And then Paul adds two reasons for this abiding, this stability in the truth. And the first is knowing from whom you learnt them.

Now, I haven't time to argue this, but it's my conviction that the whom there is the Apostle Paul himself. One reason why you must abide in what you've heard and learned, Timothy, is because you know from whom you've learned them. That is, you know that I am an authoritative apostle of Jesus Christ who have dared, in a previous verse here, to liken myself to Moses because I believe that God has given me his word to teach.

And you've not only followed my doctrine, but you've seen my life and my sufferings and these things together authenticate my gospel. And the gospel is still authenticated to us by Paul's apostolic authority, by his consistent godliness, and by his many sufferings bravely borne. And that's the first reason where to abide.

We know from whom we get the truth, namely the apostles of Jesus Christ. And the second reason why we are to abide is, verse 15, and that from a child you have known the Old Testament Scriptures. Timothy had been taught the Old Testament Scripture from childhood, doubtless here by his mother and grandmother.

He was therefore extremely familiar with the Scriptures. He believed them to be inspired by God, as Paul is about to say. And he must abide in what he's learned from Paul, not only because he knows about Paul's apostolic authority, but because what Paul taught was consistent with the Old Testament Scriptures as well.

Paul was no innovator. Paul claimed before Agrippa that what he was teaching, quoting from Acts 26, is nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass, that the Christ must suffer and that by being the first to rise from the dead he would proclaim light to both the people and to the Gentiles. Now, let's get this clear.

The two reasons why Timothy should abide in what he'd heard and firmly believed were, A, that it was apostolic, taught by the apostle Paul, and, B, that it was prophetic, taught by the Old Testament Scriptures. And they are the same two grounds today. The Gospel that you and I believe in is the biblical Gospel.

It is the Gospel of the Old Testament and it is the Gospel of the New Testament. It is vouched for by the prophets of God and the apostles of Christ. And we intend, by the grace of God, to abide in it for these reasons and because of this double authentication.

And now notice what we may learn about Scripture in the remaining verses. Two fundamental truths are taught to us. First, its origin and nature, what it is, and second, its purpose, what it's for.

First, its nature. All Scripture, verse 16, is inspired by God. And I hope you know that the Greek word here, given by inspiration of God, five words in the King James Version, is one word in the Greek, theopneustos, God-breathed.

And this does not mean that the Scripture or its human authors were breathed into by God, but that it, the Scripture, was breathed out by God. Scripture is God-breathed. Issuing from His mouth.

Inspiration is a convenient term to use, but expiration or spiration would be better because the Scripture is breathed out of the mouth of God. And the Scripture is God's word because it is God-breathed. It originated in His mind.

It issued from His mouth. Although, of course, it was spoken through human authors without destroying either their individuality or its divine authority in the process. But the authors of Scripture can say, Hear the word of the Lord.

I am speaking it. It's coming from my mouth, but it is the word of the Lord and the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. So that is the nature of Scripture, according to the apostles of Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ Himself.

It is authoritative as the word of God because it is God-breathed. Now, I want to say just a word about the essential reasonableness of the Christian doctrine of Revelation. And its reasonableness is this.

The mind of God is unattainable by the mind of men in and of themselves. Isaiah 55, God says, My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are My ways your ways. For as the heaven is higher than the earth, so are My thoughts higher than your thoughts and My ways than your ways.

There is a vast, infinite gulf between the mind of God, the infinite mind of God, and the little finite mind of man. How then is My mind ever to read the thoughts in the mind of God? And the answer is, it is impossible if I am left to Myself. My little mind cannot climb up into the infinite mind of God.

There is no ladder by which I can reach Him. And if I am ever to know what is in the mind of God, He must reveal it. And how does anybody reveal what is in their mind? Answer through their mouth, by speaking.

If I stood on this platform dumb and mum, you would not have the remotest idea what was going on in my mind. But at this moment I am speaking, and because I am speaking, you know what is in my mind, because I am clothing the thoughts of my mind in the words of my mouth. And the words of my mouth are conveying to you the thoughts of my mind.

And this is communication from the mind through the word. And this is what God has done. God has spoken, and He has declared His mind in speech.

And the Scripture is God-breathed, spoken by the mouth of God through the mouths of men. Now I must hurry on, because I have only a few more moments. We have seen that the nature of Scripture is that it is God-breathed.

What is the purpose of Scripture? Answer, it is profitable. Indeed it is profitable for men only because it is inspired by God. It is only its divine origin that secures and explains its human value and profit.

And what is its profit? Verse 15, it can make us wise unto salvation. The Bible is a book of salvation and not a book of science. The purpose of the Bible in the providence of God is not to teach scientific facts which men can discover by their own empirical investigations.

The purpose of the Bible is to teach moral and spiritual truths which can be known only by divine revelation, especially that man is a guilty sinner under the judgment of God, that God loves him in spite of

his rebellion and sent His Son to die for him and to rise again, and that the sinner can be saved if he trusts in Jesus Christ. And since the Bible is the handbook of salvation, it is simply full of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament foretells and foreshadows Him.

The Gospels tell us the story of His birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension. The Acts describe how Christ, through His apostles, continued to work to preach the gospel of salvation and to found the Church. The epistles display the full glory of the divine human person of Jesus and of His saving work.

And the Revelation portrays Christ sharing the throne of God and promises us His final victory. The Bible is full of Christ. And the Bible depicts Christ supremely as Saviour and invites us to come to Christ.

There is the whole purpose of the Bible to bear witness to Christ. And I want to say to you that evangelicals are not bibliologists. We do not worship the Bible, but rather the Christ of the Bible.

Nor are evangelicals like the Jews who suppose that eternal life was to be found in the Scriptures. No, eternal life is in Christ. But the Scriptures bear witness to Christ and that is why we love them.

Just as a lover treasures the letters of his sweetheart and her photographs, not for themselves, but because of the person of whom they speak and because they speak to him of her. So Christians love the Bible, not for itself, but because it speaks to us of Christ. The Bible is not only profitable to lead us to salvation, but it is profitable for the Christian life.

Verse 16, for teaching the truth and correcting error, for training in righteousness and for reformation in manners. I haven't time to go into the contrasts there. But if you want to overcome error and to grow in the truth, if you want to overcome evil and grow in holiness, it is to the Bible that you must turn.

For the Bible is profitable for those things. Verse 17, so that the man of God may be mature. That is the purpose of Scripture, to lead you to salvation and on into maturity.

So let me finish. We live in these times of stress and very distressing they are. Sometimes I wonder if the world and the church have gone mad.

So strange are their views and so low their standards. And many people are being swept from their moorings by the flood tide of fashion today. And others go into hiding as offering the only hope of survival and the only alternative to surrender.

Neither of these is the Christian way. Let these men wallow in self-indulgence and propagate their lies. But as for you, stand firm.

And how we need that message today. You followed so far. Abide in it.

And you can become a man of God, a woman of God, if you abide in that which you have heard and have come firmly to believe. You will grow into Christian maturity. Let us pray.

We confess to you, Lord Jesus, our great human weakness. That every one of us by nature is a reed shaken with the wind. We find it so easy to conform to the popular fashions of the day.

Grant us, we humbly pray, divine strength to stand firm and to continue in that which we have believed and been taught so that we may become men and women of God to serve our generation. For your great name's sake we pray. Amen.

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