

# WHAT the NEXT GENERATION WILL BUILD ON

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A. Timothy Heijermans  
Christian Community Church, asbl

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2 Timothy 3:10-13

## INTRODUCTION

What's your opinion about "going to church"? An absurd question to ask on Sunday morning at CCC, you say! But I'm serious. Yes, it's normal that practicing Christians attend weekly Sunday worship. But when you really stop to think about it, the phrase "going to church" has some real problems. By the time we're finished this morning, I hope we'll think about the issue differently . . . and that, where necessary, our habits and priorities will change to match how God wants us to see things.

We come this morning to the middle of 2 Timothy 3. As Pastor Joël has reminded us in the past two weeks, the opening paragraphs of this section of Paul's last canonical letter have been on the grim side. The apostle had urged Timothy to be a gentle but firm teacher as he faced false teaching and false teachers in Ephesus (2:22-26). If Timothy took this approach as the leader in Ephesus, God might grant repentance to some so that they could escape the snare of the devil. But Paul had followed up those sentences immediately with a very realistic picture about how many people would continue to follow error in the last days, in which Timothy—and we, too—minister. They would be an immoral lot, even with a veneer of spirituality. Their tactics would be seductive and self-serving (3:6-9). Grim indeed!

But now Paul, led by the Holy Spirit—the one ultimate Author behind this letter—wants to swing the focus to Timothy himself. As the apostle does that, he will look back at their long teacher-disciple relationship, a friendship and camaraderie that has lasted about twenty years. Paul will remind Timothy of what the younger man has witnessed about Paul's apostolic ministry. Then he's going to have a few words about what's still in store in the future. This will be preparation for a final challenge, beginning in 3:14 and extending to the end of the letter, which we'll be studying in the coming weeks.

## I. EXPERIENCES: A REALISTIC LOOK BACK AT THE PAST (3:10-11)

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Let's begin with the first two verses in this section. You will note that there are three verbs — "followed", "endured", and "delivered" — and that they're all in the past tense. This single sentence is a glance backwards to set Timothy's perspective right as he faces trends in the "last days" of the church. It's a pattern for discipleship and leadership preparation that Paul established, and it's reproducible today. So we need to pay close attention to this pattern, carbon-copied from Jesus' own three years of training the twelve apostles.

What's the first verb? It's "followed". This could mean that Timothy "imitated" the things we will see listed. Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:6 explicitly that Timothy had done that: ". . . constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine **which you have been following**". But here the emphasis seems to be more in the direction of what Timothy had witnessed in Paul's life by observation—"your eye has followed my every move in public and private". What had Timothy seen in Paul so that he could imitate it later?

### A. TIMOTHY WATCHED PAUL IN PUBLIC

1. **Paul's teaching** (*didaskalia*). Paul has already written Timothy about the importance of healthy doctrine (1 Timothy 1:10; 4:6). It was Paul's teaching, but of course it came from Christ (1 Timothy 1:11-12). Paul's teaching wasn't something he invented, as some claim. Paul did not recast the teaching of Jesus into some new Pauline form, so that the Christianity we know today is disconnected from its source and in some dreadfully deformed shape. Not at all! And we need to be just as committed to this unchanging truth as he was. We are not asked to change it or update it.
2. **Paul's way of life** (*agoge*). Paul's way of life was not self-serving. During his missionary journeys He didn't camp out in the poshest hotels. He traveled through dangerous territories filled with bandits to get the gospel to new places. He worked extra hours at night to pay his own expenses. He did not sacrifice principles just to get a compassionate hearing. And he was willing to go to a dank prison cell over his commitment to Christ. Much of this is foreign to us since few of us have been asked to make exactly these kinds of sacrifices. Will our children be ready to sacrifice for the gospel? They'll be more likely to if they see us as parents and adults in the church fellowship make this our pattern. They watch our way of life even more than they listen to our words.
3. **Paul's resolve** (*prothesei*). The term means "what is set out", hence "purpose" or "resolve", "determination". This is about Paul's direction, which he doggedly pursued out of dedication to Christ.

Paul must have had this determined direction because he knew God's purpose for him (2 Timothy 1:9). Jesus had revealed His purpose for Paul in the vision on the road to Damascus. He was to be an apostolic delegate to the Jews and especially to the Gentile world. Do you have a clear sense of identity in Christ and purpose for your life? Our culture is listless and directionless, but those who follow us need to see a clear sense of drive and resolve in our public example.

#### B. TIMOTHY WATCHED PAUL IN PRIVATE

But there was more to Paul's example than what Timothy could watch in public. He could also discern the kinds of changes Christ had made in Paul's character, given what he had been in the past as a persecutor of the church (1 Timothy 1:13).

1. **Paul's faith** (*pistis*). Paul's trust in God at moments when he and Timothy served together and when they did not know God's purpose for them—like the circumstances of Paul's and Silas' imprisonment in Philippi—was an example. Paul and Silas sang in the dungeon! That's the life of faith Timothy could see! Our young people need to see our trust in God when things do not go according to plan.
2. **Paul's patience** (*makrothumia*). This term means "long of soul/breath" and is an example of patience under the stress of conflicting relationships. Lightfoot remarks, "While *hupomone* is the temper which does not easily succumb under suffering, *makrothumia* is the self-restraint which does not hastily retaliate a wrong. The one is opposed to cowardice or despondency, the other to wrath or revenge". Ouw-Nida define it this way: "a state of emotional calm in the face of provocation or misfortune and without complaint or irritation". Paul could have had a vindictive attitude toward many of the people who opposed him. Even some believers criticized him. But he was not a man to hold a grudge. This is still a rare quality today, and an important aspect of discipling others.
3. **Paul's love** (*agape*). This word is all about a Christlike spirit of self-sacrifice. Biblical love does not seek its own comfort or advantage, Timothy could have seen that character quality, shaped by the Lord Jesus Christ over the years, in his mentor.

#### C. TIMOTHY WATCHED PAUL'S RESPONSE TO PERSECUTION

More specifically, Paul knew Timothy had followed Paul's record of responses to persecution for the gospel, even though there was no legitimate reason for him to be violently or emotionally opposed.

1. **At Pisidian Antioch** (Acts 13:14, 50). There devout Jewish women and leading men of the city mounted a campaign against Paul to kick him out of town. When Paul's reputation was publicly besmirched, did he give up? No!
2. **At Iconium** (Acts 13:51; 14:1, 19-21). Luke tells us that the Jews in Iconium stirred up people's minds to embitter them to the point where they plotted to stone him. When Paul was intimidated by gossip and plots, did he give up? No!
3. **At Lystra** (Acts 14:6,8,21; 16:1; 27:5), Timothy's home town. It was in this city that people stoned Paul outside the city limits and left him for dead. When he'd been through an assassination plot by religious people convinced of their rightness, did he give up? No!

Paul says, "I endured them". That means he bore up under them. They left him unswayed in his loyalty to Christ and to the dissemination of the gospel. Furthermore, the Lord delivered (rescued) him from all those situations. Timothy had been a witness of it all. When your disciples seem ready to throw in the towel for Christian service, what character changes in your life can you point to?

#### D. APPLICATIONS FOR US

1. **Let's be committed to the importance of leadership for the next generation.**

I recently read statistics on the decline in the RC church in France, recorded by Jérôme Fourquet, an analyst for the Ifop polling institute, in a book released in February 2019, *L'Archipel français* (The French Archipelago). In 1961 baptism of infants was the norm with 92% of French children baptized. Today about 30% of children are baptized. In 1961 38% of baptized Catholics said they attended mass every Sunday; today the figure is at 7%. Why the change?

According to Fourquet the shift began with changes made at Vatican Council II in the early 1960s. From that point on the number of priests began to decline from 177,000 to 51,500 today. Parish clergy in France today numbers under 12,000. African, Latin American and Asia recruits fill the gap. They lost their authority in the church, and had to remain poor and celibate. As that figure dropped, church attendance did, too. And so did commitment to marriage, to births in wedlock (today 60% of births in France are out of wedlock), opposition to abortion, and opposition to the homosexual lifestyle in its various manifestations. As a result France today is a nation of mini-societies—an archipelago—that risks civil war if things continue along the present trajectory. Leadership is crucial in every faith

and in every country of the planet. Let's learn something from France's experience! What would be the stats for Bible-believing churches in France? In Luxembourg? How committed are we to the next generation?

2. **Let's pursue Paul's pattern of long-term life-on-life discipleship in the context of ministry.** Preparing the leaders for the next generation requires the same dynamics as rearing a family. It's not fast. And it's done in little ways, day in, day out. We're reading about the results of over twenty years of Timothy's experience with Paul, beginning with his first exposure to Paul's persecutions in the summer of AD 48, until the time of the writing of 2 Timothy in the autumn of AD 67.

Furthermore, all three packages in the list must be included—public actions, private character and responses in stress. It's not enough to have completed a course in Bible doctrine, although that's a good vehicle to get the public teaching. But we learn the most about the realities of ministry by watching how to solve problems when things get sticky—church discipline, difficult people, open opposition from outside, dissension, etc. Spiritual leadership is forged like steel in the fire, not shaped in seconds by plastic mold injection. This is the God-designed method for discipleship. We cannot streamline it or improve on it.

3. **Let's not flinch when young believers (and older ones, too!) must be exposed to opposition.** We tend to protect our children, sometimes too much. We have had two to three generations in Europe without war, and we rejoice that they have not had to witness the violence of open conflict. But in the meanwhile the devil has continued to be active in opposing the church. Somehow we need to learn to endure hardness in a soft society, when people don't learn to do hard things anymore. Let's encourage our children to learn these skills by letting them live with more of the results of poor decisions, or by encouraging them to try things they think are too difficult. Most of all, let's expose them to the realities of serving others when it might not be pleasant.

## **II. EXPECTATIONS: A REALISTIC LOOK TOWARD THE FUTURE (3:12-13)**

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The second paragraph, unlike the previous one, has three verbs that focus on the future — “will be persecuted”, “desire to live”, and “will proceed”. So the text points to what's ahead for Timothy and any Christian who desires to get his shoulder behind the Lord Jesus Christ's cause in the world today.

### **A. PERSECUTION FOR THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO LIVE GODLY LIVES**

In contrast to those who have only a form of godliness (3:5), all who decide to live godly lives will face opposition. Their culture will not be friendly. They must not expect to be popular. They will not get rave reviews in the press. They will be the butt of jokes and injustice. And that will not be because they love to be hated. Christians are not psychotic cases or lovers of a Nietzschean “slave morality” that craves control over the master by groveling in self-pity.

So what shape does this opposition take? Paul uses the term “persecution”. Maybe you don't feel particularly persecuted today. Maybe no one has ever threatened you for believing in Jesus as the only Savior from sin. But realize that persecution can take at least two shapes . . .

1. **The persecution that wounds and kills.** Christianity today the most persecuted religious group in the world. Check out statistics and you may be amazed that those who at least profess to believe the gospel face extermination more than any other religious group today.
2. **The persecution that seduces and deadens to truth.** Academic sociology and literary theory in the academy since the end of WWII has swung strongly in the direction of a group of thinkers who identified themselves as the Frankfurt School. They noted that consumer society with its popular culture—art, film, music—exposed everyone at the same time to the same notions and left people passive. These pervasive cultural influences were missing when traditional Marxism first attempted to overthrow bourgeois society before WWI. But with these tools in hand an elite could now shape world culture in new ways and bring in the rule of a new elite through culture and ideology.

The party line, now common currency across the West, is that everything in society is about power. There is no Truth, only a confrontation between Oppressor and the Oppressed. The Oppressor decides what's moral and appropriate; the Oppressed seek to free themselves from those arbitrary rules. So we need to get rid of the notion of absolutes—they are just the tools of the Oppressor. The Oppressed include just about anyone except white heterosexual males—especially dead ones. So if you are a woman, you are oppressed by men. If you are a person of color, you are oppressed by whites. If you are part of the LGTBQ+ community you are oppressed by heterosexual families. The answer to liberating these oppressed people is to free them by giving them more advantages than

others, and by suppressing the voices of the oppressive groups who used to set the rules. Problem: what is unjust? You need an unchanging standard to determine what's abusive and oppressive.

If you are alert to the messages in the culture and the media, you'll spy this just about everywhere. Maybe that's why a Ukrainian believer visiting one of our colleagues in Spain recently commented, when asked about the war in that country, "Yes, the war in Ukraine is bad, but the spiritual war in Spain is much stronger".

The devil persecutes today by seducing as well as by openly wounding. Come to think about it, seduction is often more successful than extermination. So these are the points of temptation you and I face most for the moment:

- a. **Faith in human reason** . . . but human reason is blighted by the fall, and therefore we cannot think rightly.
- b. **Faith in human emotion** . . . but human emotion becomes a brutal slave-driver, not a loving, liberating master.
- c. **Faith in "freeing" human choices** . . . but we are not free to choose the consequences of our actions.
- d. **Faith in our right to interpret the Bible as we wish** . . . but this is an affront to God, who had one thing in mind when He guided the human authors when they penned Scripture.

## B. DEEPENING DECEPTION FOR THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO BELIEVE ERROR

Christians choose to serve God even though they know they will be persecuted. But what of others? Is their future bright? Paul says it isn't, because although the false teachers promise freedom and power to their disciples, in fact their condition will worsen in two ways:

1. **Evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse.** This seems to contradict what Paul has written in 3:9, in that false teachers would not make further progress. But in that sentence he was explaining that in the end truth would win out, and that they would not be able to advance without collapsing at some point. But here he is saying that the powers of seduction will intensify in the short term. Culture and education will not purge us of the pride, greed and corruption that spoil so much of life. God reveals that on average we are on a downward slope in the world.
2. **Evil men and imposters will themselves be deceived as they deceive others.** Ironic, isn't it? Deceivers are themselves deceived. Think about Balaam in Numbers 22-25/2 Peter 2:15. John wrote "if we say that we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves" (1 John 1:8). This is the self-deception that says "I'm okay because God accepts me as I am". Paul warned, "do not be deceived, what a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7). This is the self-deception that says, "I can set my own rules for life and everything will turn out just fine". How many intelligent people are convinced that these notions are true, and teach them to others, despite the overwhelming evidence from history that they are false? Deceivers become convinced that their deception has integrity!

## C. APPLICATIONS:

1. **Let's not be cocky about our opinions.** If so many people can seem so sure they are right, and yet be so deluded, shouldn't we be watchful about our assumptions? Shouldn't we be asking God each day to deliver us from our easy confidence in ourselves? "**The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?**" (Jeremiah 17:9).
2. **Let's be committed to learning and obeying the Scriptures, which are the only remedy for deception.** We must tune a violin to a fixed frequency, not to itself, or we will not be able to make music with others. We must tune our lives to the truth of what God has said, not to our emotions or our own way of thinking. Jesus said, "you err, not knowing the Scriptures" (Mark 12:24).

## CONCLUSION

So what's the alternative to "going to church"? It's not enough, is it? The Christian life is a daily life of fellowship and life-long training in righteousness through the Word of God and personal discipleship. That leads us into the final sentences of this chapter, and we'll hear about that next week. It's daily, life-long training in righteousness that we need. And that makes going to church meaningful for us and the next generation.

If the next generation is going to have a living church, it's not enough for the present generation just to "go to church". The next generation watches us carefully and quickly sees our failings. But it can also see the changes God has made in our character, our direction and resolve. Need to adjust something? Begin this week!