

# Faith Under Pressure

2 TIMOTHY 3:10-15

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This morning I'd like to take a few moments to just barely touch on part of a request from at least two of our members as they were asking for some encouragement for those times when we face pressure for living the Christian life. I realize that most of us might not relate to the kind of persecution faced by Daniel in the Old Testament or Paul in the New Testament, but many of us do face pressure.

Persecution is not always physical. Sometimes, persecution comes in the form of criticism. We think about what Jesus said in Luke 6:22-23, ***"Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets."*** In Matthew's account, Jesus says, ***"Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me."*** So again, there's no beating going on here, but the Lord does refer to being ***"hated"*** and ***"ostracized"*** and ***"insulted"*** and ***"scorned"*** and falsely accused. Peter says something similar in 1 Peter 4:1-5 as he tells us to prepare for this kind of mistreatment. He says,

***<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, <sup>2</sup> so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. <sup>3</sup> For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. <sup>4</sup> In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you; <sup>5</sup> but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.***

So again, Peter describes our change of life as God's people - we no longer go to the drinking parties, we no longer participate in sexual sin, and our friends are ***"surprised"*** by that, so they ***"malign"*** us. They might not stone us to death or beat us for not doing what they are doing (and what we used to do), but they say things about us. They ***"malign"*** us. They gossip and slander us. They mock us as being out of touch or out of step.

We might face discrimination in some form or another. We might be excluded from a friendship. We might even face pressure to compromise or else lose a job or some other opportunity. Just yesterday, you might

have noticed the little blurb on some news sites about Neal McDonough losing a role as an actor for refusing to kiss anybody but his own wife. We read that, and we're actually amazed that he made it this far in Hollywood! He's been on TV and in various movies on and off since 1991 - Quantum Leap, NYPD Blue, Band of Brothers, Desperate Housewives, Minority Report, Captain America. But a while back, he says he was cut from a starring role for not doing a particular scene with a woman who was not his wife. He is Catholic. He is a married father of five. And he says that his lips belong only to his wife. I'm actually shocked that he made it through NYPD Blue and Desperate Housewives!

But again, in terms of our lesson today, we're not talking beatings and beheadings and the hardcore kind of persecution we've seen in the past and even in some other parts of the world right now, but we're talking about pressure, harassment, and insults - perhaps even the loss of friends, or maybe the loss of a job. As we think about these challenges, as we think about this pressure, I would invite you to turn with me this morning to 2 Timothy 3 as the apostle Paul gives some inspired advice to the young preacher Timothy who was apparently facing something similar.

2 Timothy, of course, is the last book we have from the apostle Paul, and it was written near the end of Paul's life, as he is in Rome waiting to be put to death for preaching the gospel. He writes to Timothy with some very practical advice, and by the time we get to 2 Timothy 3, Paul is describing how things will get worse over time. In these last days, in the Christian age, **"difficult times will come,"** he says in verse 1. He then goes on to describe some terrible men who will come in and try to wreak havoc on the church. **"Avoid such men as these,"** he says in verse 5. So, there's this ominous picture of those who would try to destroy the church, but our passage this morning actually starts in verse 10, as Paul gives Timothy some practical advice on how to deal with what's going on here, some wise advice on how to deal with the pressure or persecution from these evil men. The passage is found on page 1863 in our pew Bibles - 2 Timothy 3:10-15,

***<sup>10</sup> Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, <sup>11</sup> persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! <sup>12</sup> Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. <sup>13</sup> But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. <sup>14</sup> You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, <sup>15</sup> and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.***

- I. **As we look back at this paragraph, Paul starts (in verses 10-11) by putting himself out there as an example, basically encouraging Timothy to LOOK TO THOSE WHO HAVE ENDURED SUFFERING AS EXAMPLES OF HOW TO HANDLE IT HIMSELF - REMEMBER THE FAITHFUL.**

Timothy has followed Paul carefully in the past, and Paul is reminding him now: To deal with these evil men and this pressure they'll be putting on you in the future, keep it up! Continue following me very carefully. When I think of **"following closely,"** I think of those who tailgate on the beltline. Of course, that's a negative example. But in a positive way, the word was used in the ancient world to refer to an apprentice following a master who was teaching a trade. In a similar way, and in a very positive way, Paul, then, is putting himself out there as an example. As Timothy has followed carefully in the past, he is to continue. And the emphasis here is: Remember how I handled persecution, and follow my example. And he gives examples that Timothy would have remembered. Remember what happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra. And this is the area where Timothy was from. In Antioch, Paul was thrown out of town for preaching the gospel. In Iconium, Paul

was nearly stoned to death for preaching. In Lystra, Paul was actually stoned and left for dead, but he got up and kept on preaching.

So, in spite of the pressure, in spite of the persecution, Paul continued preaching and teaching, and so he's saying here: Look at my teaching, my conduct, my purpose, my faith, my patience, my love, my perseverance. Remember my persecutions and my sufferings, and do what I did. In a sense, tailgate me! Follow me very carefully. And there's wisdom and encouragement in that, to know that somebody else has faced the same thing and has stayed faithful.

Today, we look to some of the great heroes of the Bible. And when we think about it, we realize that we wouldn't even know about many of these people if it weren't for the difficult things they faced, if it weren't for the challenges they overcame - Joseph, and Moses, and Elijah, and Esther, and Daniel, and John the Baptist, and even Paul himself.

Today, we can look to these with careful reading and study, but I would suggest that we might also look to more modern examples today. We think of Roberta Edwards, the Christian woman who ran the children's home in Haiti for so many years, saving hundreds if not thousands of children from starvation and filth, but also teaching the gospel. As a church, many years ago we collected flip-flops after one of the earthquakes or hurricanes that hit down there. I took those to Tennessee when I went down for the FHU Lectures in February, and we joined with hundreds of other churches in sending a shipment to Port au Prince where all of that footwear was distributed. Unfortunately, just a few years ago, Roberta gave up her life as she was murdered by kidnappers who pulled up behind her at a stop sign and took one of those children. Roberta is a modern-day spiritual hero, a woman who continued teaching, and feeding, and clothing these children in the name of Jesus, until the very end. She is one of these faithful that we can look to for inspiration, just as Timothy looked up to Paul.

The world is very quick to give us terrible role models, but we don't need to look very far to find some true spiritual heroes. Paul's advice seems to be: Look to those who are faithful for encouragement.

**II. As we go back to our text for today, we continue on with verses 12-13, and we find that when it comes to handling pressure and persecution Paul straight up tells Timothy to EXPECT IT.**

This is the promise we do not want to hear! But it is a promise, ***"Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."*** Have you ever seen this promise in a meme on Facebook or Instagram? This is not the kind of promise that we'd like to see as a motto for our congregation. This isn't the kind of promise that attracts new members. But there it is, ***"...all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."*** And like most promises in the Bible, it is conditional. Not everybody will be persecuted, but only those ***"who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus."*** Have you been persecuted lately? Have you been harassed in some way for what you believe? Have you faced some kind of pressure for your Christian faith? If we haven't, what does that mean? ***"...all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."***

Why is that? Why will we face pressure or persecution just for living the Christian life? I think it goes back to something Jesus says right after one of the most famous verses anywhere in the Bible. Right after John 3:16 (about God loving the world), Jesus goes on to say, ***"This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."*** When we live and teach the light, our lives and our teaching expose darkness, and people don't like it. A few days ago, I saw

hand sanitizer advertised on a meme as “paper cut finder.” Have you ever used hand sanitizer right after getting a paper cut? That’s how the world often looks at us! If we are living godly lives, Paul says that we will be persecuted. Our lives are the paper cut finders of this world. Our words and our lives will convict this world of sin. And for that reason, we will face pressure. John illustrates this in 1 John 3 by using the example of Cain, who killed his brother. John says, **“And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous. Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you”** (1 John 3:12-13).

Sometimes, then, people see the way we live, they see the way they live, and they are reminded that they are not making the best decisions. Maybe it’s us turning down a drink when we head out after work. Maybe it’s the way we speak and the words we don’t use. But they see a contrast, and it’s convicting. That’s what John says. And if they don’t see a difference, why is that?

It might not just be behavior - maybe it’s because of what we believe. We believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven. Do the people around us know we believe this? Do we really believe it? If we do, and if people don’t know we believe it, why is that? We believe that all people need to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of their sins. Those who believe and are baptized will be saved, but those who do not believe will be condemned. Do people know we believe this? We believe that marriage is between a man and a woman and is to last for a lifetime. Do people know we believe this? If that ever gets out to the people around us, is there a chance we might face some pressure because of that? We certainly don’t need to be mean about any of this, but we need to realize that Paul makes a promise here. When we live as we should, we will face persecution.

Timothy needed to hear this. We need to hear this. Sometimes we need to be reassured that what we are going through is normal. It might not be death threats. It might not be being chased down the street. But all of us need to expect persecution. And we need to prepare for it.

### III. And that leads us to what comes next, because Paul’s advice is to **CONTINUE IN THE WORD.**

After this terrible promise that anyone who lives a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, Paul continues in verses 14-15 by saying, **“You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”** So, as opposed to being disillusioned by this pressure or persecution, Paul tells Timothy to continue in the things he had learned, and then he mentions that Timothy had known these **“sacred writings” “from childhood.”** That word for **“childhood”** is not used very often in the New Testament, and when it is, it is used of little babies, both before and after they are born. It’s used of John the Baptist, the **“baby”** that leaps in Elizabeth’s womb when Elizabeth meets Mary (who is carrying Jesus in her womb at the time). The word is also used to refer to Jesus when he was placed in the manger. The word is used to refer to the **“babies”** who were brought to Jesus. By the way, all of these uses of the word are found in Luke up to this point. We remember that Luke was a medical doctor. As a physician, Luke knew that a baby is a baby - before the baby is born and after the baby is born.

But for the purpose of our study this morning, I find it interesting that Timothy knew the sacred scriptures **“from childhood,”** from infancy - perhaps, even, from the time before he was born! Parents need to know this. We need to be reading the word of God to our children, even before they are born. They might not be able to understand it, but from infancy, even tiny little children have a way of absorbing information that we as adults may never understand. Even with scripture, they absorb the sound of the words and the rhythm of it. Even as newborns, they see our respect for the word of God.

But going back to our text, we find that Timothy not only knew the word of God, but he had **“become convinced”** of it. He believed it. He built his life on it. The word of God gave him the kind of wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Jesus. There are many who read the Bible who don’t really believe it, who perhaps are embarrassed by it - what it teaches about creation, what it teaches about the design of marriage, and so on. Timothy, though, was “convinced” by what he read. And in a time of pressure or persecution, Paul encourages this young man to continue on with what he has known from childhood. Continue in the Word.

### **Conclusion:**

As we close our thoughts on this pressure we face, we have some reminders from Paul. We need to remember the faithful (both ancient and modern), looking to others who have faced persecution for their faith, looking to them for encouragement. Paul also tells us to expect this pressure we face. We might not like it, but we have a promise from God that if we desire to live godly lives, we will face persecution. And so we might as well prepare for it, and we prepare by continuing in the word - by believing what we read.

If you are not yet a Christian, this morning we’d like to encourage you to make that decision - join us in facing this pressure for the faith that we hold! The Son of God came to this earth and offered himself up as a perfect sacrifice for us. All of us have sinned, but he took the punishment we deserved, and in response, he wants us to turn to him in faith, calling out for a good conscience through the act of immersion in water. We are buried with him in baptism and are then raised up to live the Christian life. In baptism, God forgives our sins and adds us to his family, the church. If you’d like to study further, let us know. But if you know what you need to do and are ready to obey the gospel immediately, I’d love to talk to you right now as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

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