

2 Timothy 3:14-17: Continuing in the Truth

OUTLINE

Holding to the Word
What is the Word?
Sufficiency of the Word

INTRODUCTION

One of the phrases I heard over and over in 2020 was 'deconversion story.' We have all heard about conversion stories of people becoming Christians, well, these are stories of people who claim to have once been Christians who turn away in a very public way. Inevitably this results in those young in the faith being shaken. There was the deconversion of Joshua Harris, the author of 'I Kissed Dating Goodbye.' He was well known for his book that revolutionized the Christian dating scene seeking to push people to date with a view to marriage and not in the worldly way. The cracks began to show when he publicly disowned the book and apologized to any who were burdened with legalism and guilt. This was followed a few years later by the announcement of his divorce and that he was no longer a believer. His next public appearance was at a gay pride march.

Another is the famous deconversions of Rhett and Link Millennial Youtube stars and podcasters. 'Rhett and Link have grown their brand performing hilarious satirical songs and engaging in zany stunts such as duct-taping themselves together, playing wedgie-hangman, crushing glow sticks in a meat-grinder, and flinging bags of dog feces at one another's faces. With guest appearances on *The TODAY Show*, *Live with Kelly*, and *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, their stars have been rising for the past few years, swelling their net worth to an estimated \$23 million. They were also Christians, former missionaries, and Campus Crusade (now Cru) staff members.¹

Another is the deconversion of Bart Ehrman a one-time fundamentalist Christian who gradually but continually doubted the various supernatural aspects of the Bible until he became an agnostic and now goes around undermining the historical reliability of the Bible.

There is nothing new under the sun, this is not a new thing where suddenly, now that we live in the information age we can finally see the falsity of the Bible and Christianity and people are suddenly falling away. No, what we have is the ability to track with the daily lives of people on the other side of the planet in an instant. It is just more in our face, the attacks on our faith are more regular, pervasive and popularized than ever before. Today I would like to preach to you a new year's sermon. As I thought about what I would want to say to you as a pastor as you think about your walk with the Lord in 2021 I pondered this sad reality of people who were once Christians leaving the faith. And so I want to preach on continuing in the truth, and we will address that from 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

We live in an age where we are not only seeing Christians leave the faith, we are watching Christians give up things they have believed for thousands of years. I was listening to an interview with Carl Trueman this past week and there is something that he said that stuck out to me. When he entered the pastorate an older man said this to him, 'Don't think that anyone under the age of 35 will agree with your view on sexual ethics.' Today even those who profess Christ think that co-habiting before marriage is ok, that attending same-sex weddings and celebrating them is ok, that walking in gay pride marches in support of their friends is ok, that gay marriages are legitimate in the eyes of God, that same-sex attraction

1 <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/rhett-link-deconversion/>

is not a sin, that a person can identify as transgender, and that categories other than male or female exist. But it is not just sexual ethics, Christians can now be pro-abortion, pro-euthanasia, pro-recreational marijuana, this is an age where many Christians are capitulating. As I pondered this reality and wondered at the reasons why, here is one way to process this. We are seeing the difference between cultural Christianity and convictional Christianity. And the difference between those things is whether we absorb our values from the world or the Bible.

You see in past generations the values of our culture and the teachings of the Bible were mostly in harmony. Men were men and women were women, family structure was right and commendable, sobriety was prized as a sign of responsible adulthood, hard work was virtuous, marriage was the proper place to express sexual love. Because of this cultural acceptance of Christian standards you could drift along in your Christianity because everyone else was just doing the right thing. You can know whether your Christian values are shaped by the Bible or by the culture by the fact that you go along with what culture tells you or what the Bible says. We are seeing many people who are jettisoning their Christianity and their Christian ethics because they were never convictionally Christian only cultural Christians. I want to challenge you to live as convictional Christians in 2021. I know that the pressure is high, that high profile people are giving ground all around us. We are seeing the largest and fastest changes that society has ever undergone, but will we stand true, will we continue in the truth.

For our new year's meditation I want to direct you to 2 Timothy 3:14-17. Firstly appreciate the context: Paul warns Timothy about a massive turning away from the truth, v1-7, 'But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ²For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. ⁶For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, ⁷always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.' These descriptions sound just like what we are seeing today. But Paul then reminds Timothy of his good practice in contrast to those who have turned away. In v10-11 he talks about how Timothy has properly followed Paul as he has followed Christ, in v12 he reminds Timothy of this truism that all who seek to live a godly life in Christ Jesus are in the minority and will suffer persecution suffering ridicule, rejection and more violent treatment. V13 describes the compounding nature of the problem, 'while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.' The immorality gains critical mass, and the deceptions pick up supporters along the way. V14-17 are Paul's encouragements in how to stay true to the truth. We will be looking at this section under three heading, hold to the word, what is the word?, and the sufficiency of the word.

Hold to the word

V14-15, 'But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.' Here we see Paul calling Timothy to continue in the truth that he has firmly believed. This is the call that we all need to heed. In a world of lies Paul calls us to hold to the truth. In a world that does not believe in objective truth or ontology we are called to hold firm to the word of God. Timothy who was half-Jewish but who had been schooled in

the biblical worldview as a boy by his mother and grandmother is being told to hold onto those truths. The truth of YHWH, that He is real, that He is our Creator, that we were made in His image to do His will, that mankind is fallen in sin, and that God has promised a Savior born of woman to save us. The truth of God working in history through miracles to save His people, the historicity of the OT, the reality of angels and demons, heaven and hell, God's law by which we should live and His teachings on sexual immorality. The truth about marriage, family, sexual identity, and why we suffer. Hold firm to these truths.

In particular Paul tells Timothy that he learned the most important truth from the bible, the way of salvation in Jesus Christ. The OT is full of types and shadows preparing the world to welcome the One who would die to save us from Satan's power, who would die to pay our sin debt, who would be the lamb of God who takes away our sins so that we can be reconciled to a holy God. The need for salvation, because we cannot save ourselves is taught there; the way of salvation that we must be saved by faith not our own works is taught there; the person who saves us, Jesus Christ is prophesied in it too. There is no other book that teaches this.

Why must Timothy hold fast to them? Paul gives us two reasons, firstly, because of who he learned from, namely Paul and his godly mother and grandmother, and secondly because of what he learned, the sacred writings, the word of God itself. Timothy was disciple by the apostle Paul. What Paul taught Timothy is trustworthy because He is an apostle. He is hand pricked by Christ, granted special revelation and put in a position over the church that all Christians are bound by. But we must not gloss over the fact that Timothy had been brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord by his mother and grandmother. We must not underestimate the importance of the influence of godly parents upon children. This is the reason why parents should pray and read the bible with their children, why they should talk about the world they live in from the perspective of a biblical worldview. We learn our ethics, our religion and our view of the world from our parents. Today we have given that ability over to schools and devices which stream values and opinions and views of the world essentially reeducating our young people. Which view of the world seems more compelling, the one taught to you by your old, uncool, not famous, stodgy parents, who are people of average intelligence and who are ..., well, ...old! Or the view that is projected by young good looking people who have thousands of fans who stage happiness for the viewers in an immersive social media experience, who are a brand, who are trending, and who brazenly challenge traditional values and ethics in intimate moment so of 'selfie-honesty.' Remembering the divine source of the truths we learned as children, knowing the apostolic source of what we believe, knowing that our values and beliefs are built upon the eternal word of God not the passing fancy of a modern young person, this is what we must choose to stand upon.

What is the word?

Building our lives on the foundation of God's word is the most solid foundation we can ask for in an age where truth is whatever you feel it to be. The nature of our bibles is described in two ways in this text. Firstly, we see that Paul calls them the sacred scriptures, and secondly, we see that he says they are God-breathed. Because of what the Bible is, God's very words, it is beneficial to us. The Bible is not like any other book, it is not merely writings, but the sacred writings. These are God's revealed words to us. We are told that they are God-breathed. If you have a translation that says 'inspired,' that is not the best translation of theopneustos. It is not as if God came along to a human document and decided to breathe into it, in other words adopt/bless an already human document. No, God breathed out the Bible. Technically it is expired not inspired, breathed out not breathed

into. But to talk about the doctrine of the expiration of scripture can send a wrong message. No, the Bible is the product of God overseeing those who wrote it ensuring that what was written could be called God's word, truth, revelation. God did not possess the scriptural writers but using their personalities, understanding, vocabulary, cultural embeddedness, spoke through them by His Holy Spirit. The end result being human words written by human authors in human understandings but whose content was God's word and which was kept from error.

There is no other set of writings with the Bible's credentials, with the Bible's proven track record. The origination of the Bible by God's Spirit, the antiquity of the bible, the preservation of the text for many centuries, the history of the Bible, the prophecies of the bible, the morality of the Bible, the unity of the Bible, the meaningful and purposeful worldview the Bible gives us explaining all of life's basic questions: is there a God, who made me, why am I here, what am I, what am I for, etc. The redemptive story at the center of the Bible which centers around Christ. The description of our fallen condition. All of these things and more go to prove that the Bible is God's word and is a faithful and solid foundation upon which to build. What it is ensures its effectiveness. This is why David writes, Ps. 19:7-11, 'The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.' In v7-9 we see six characteristics of God's word described and the effects they have. Our enlivening and education, our holiness and our happiness, is found when we continue in the truth of God's word.

Sufficiency of the word

Paul has described what the bible is now he describes what it is for, v16-17, 'All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.' Here we are told that the Bible is profitable, that it is sufficient, enough to equip us for every good work. This is our basic conviction about the Bible, this is the conviction that every Christian should have about the Bible. John MacArthur records a conversation with a so called Christian who did not hold this view, 'I once agreed to debate a man who led an "evangelical" homosexual denomination. I asked, "What do you do with the Bible's condemnations of homosexuality as sin?" "Oh, come on!" he said. "Everybody knows that the Bible is psychologically unsophisticated, reflecting the views of primitive thinking. The Bible is antiquated in its sociological theory. You cannot go to an ancient document like this and expect to deal with twentieth-century social problems. The Bible ought to stay in its own environment. It needs to be updated with a contemporary understanding of psychological and sociological phenomena."² Paul disagrees.

We see that the bible is profitable for four things, teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness. Traditionally these four things have been divided into two categories, the first two have to do with what we believe, this covers the positive and negative aspect of what we believe, it teaches us the truth, and it reproves error. The second couple have to do with our ethics, or conduct. It corrects us and it trains us in righteousness. This has led

² <https://www.tms.edu/m/tmsj15g.pdf>

to Christians talking about the sufficiency of the Bible for faith and life, all we believe and how we ought to live.

This then is how we use the Bible, when you want to know something true believe what the bible says, when you want to reproof error, prove it wrong by the Bible. The Bible will teach you the difference between truth and error, right and wrong. Likewise when it comes to personal correction and training us in holiness, it is the commands and instructions of the Bible which correct us and point us in the right direction. Sadly, we live in an age that no longer recognizes the authority of the Bible, we follow the authority of human authorities, intellectuals, trends, and emotions. I love the way Al Mohler puts it: 'Much of what we have seen in our secular moment is a battle between revolution and revelation. The secular worldview eventually displaced a biblical worldview. Eventually, all claims of divine revelation become meaningless in a secular space. In the academy, there is an ever increasing hostility to the any claim of revelation. Elsewhere, claims that the bible is the word of God are met with a form of intellectual embarrassment. The church is the final place in a hyper-modern society where the statement 'God says' makes any sense at all—but it had better make total sense in the church.'³

V17 tells us that the man of God, in other words the Christian minister will be made complete, this means perfect, suitable, exactly fitted, for every good work. All that God requires of us, all that we need to help us in every situation. The Bible is enough. In principle or precept it helps us to address every possible situation that can arise in a fallen world and help us to know the truth and right way to walk. God has not left us without guidance and help. The word is a lamp for our feet, and it will not mislead us. It will lead us in the paths of righteousness which will be paths of green pasture, refreshing for our souls, happiness as we do what we are made for, and the path by which we glorify God.

2021 lies around the corner, Christians are seen as an enemy and part of the problem, the Bible has the reputation as being a book of oppression and lies, but we know that it is divine truth that equips us to know how to live. Will we be true to the Bible and continue in what we have learnt from it? This is my challenge for you for 2021, recognise the times that we are living in, see the many pressures and the ways in which they are increasing around us, do not be intimidated by the fact that we are out numbered, by the fact that Christians are being shouted down and pushed out to the margins as irrelevant, do not think that the Bible is not enough, that it is anything less than God's word. Do not forsake what you have learned no matter how many famous people stand against it. The world is going crazy and things are going from bad to worse but we have enough in God and His word to sustain and direct us through these dark times.