

Thoroughly equipped for every good work

Ps. 30: 1, 4 – 7

Ps. 15: 1 – 3

Ps. 119:1, 4, 40

Ps. 40: 4

Ps. 126: 1, 2

Scripture reading: 2 Tim. 3: 1 – 4:5

Text: 2 Tim. 3: 10 – 17

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

The so called evangelical movement, in our day, does not belong to one bond of churches. It is also not tied to one confession. The evangelical movement includes Roman Catholics, Charismatics, Baptists, and members of almost any denomination. The movement itself does not want to tie itself to one church or to one confession. Instead, it seeks as much as possible the unity of all believers across church borders. And in seeking this broad unity it tends to simplify the faith.

For that reason someone said: The evangelical movement is ten miles wide, and a half inch deep.

The enormous numerical growth of this movement in our day is not accidental. It ties in with the mind frame of post modern thinking.

All truth has become subjective and relative. Your confession is then only your interpretation of the truth. Your confession is then only your interpretation of the Bible. And you may have that, as long as you leave room for another man to have his opinion.

In that regard post modernism caters for the private individual. Let each man have his own opinion. Yes, all truth has become subjective and relative – a matter of private interpretation and opinion.

If there is anything that does not fit the age of post modernism, then it is fixed doctrine. In the mind frame of post modern Christianity doctrine only divides the churches, but experience unites!

While post modern man is not interested in doctrine, while doctrine and teaching have become dirty words, the mind is abandoned in a search for mystical experience.

Dear congregation, this morning we may witness the public profession of faith of six young members. They are ready to confess that they wholeheartedly believe the doctrine of the Word of God, which is summarised in the confessions and taught here in this church.

They are also ready to promise that they, by the grace of God, will continue steadfastly in this doctrine in life and in death, and that they will reject all heresies and errors conflicting with God's Word.

These young members are different from the rest of the world. They do not pull a face when they hear the word *doctrine*. They have made the Reformed doctrine their own, and they are ready to promise that they, by the grace of God, will continue in this doctrine for the rest of their lives, yes, in life and in death.

When they will sit with us at the Lord's Table we will be united in one confession of one truth of one God.

Their confession is not their private interpretation of the truth, each one differing from the other. No, by the grace of God they are united with us and we with them in the same understanding of the Scriptures, in one truth, one Lord.

Brothers and sisters, in the opening words of our text this morning, the apostle Paul speaks about this unity. Timothy carefully followed the apostle's doctrine and manner of life.

Doctrine and life are one. Doctrine comes first. A godly life proceeds from godly doctrine. There is no good works without good doctrine.

Yes, all of life proceeds from the doctrine we confess.

It is the doctrine of God's Word that unites us in one faith, but also in one manner of life. We all have the same mind, the same purpose in life, the same manner of life, for our whole life is formed and directed by one doctrine – a doctrine that equips us for all of life, yes, for every good work.

I proclaim God's Word to you with the theme:

The doctrine of God's Word equips us for every good work

We will note three things:

1. The time in which Timothy lived
2. The education he received
3. The profit of holy Scripture

In the first place we note...

The time in which Timothy lived

It was about 65 AD. The apostle Paul is in Rome in prison for preaching the gospel. This time he will be killed for his faith, and he knows it – chapter 4: 6.

While he is awaiting his trial and certain death, he writes this powerful letter of exhortation to Timothy to remain steadfast.

Timothy is still so young and the opposition is strong. This young man confessed his faith in front of many witnesses. He is a faithful follower of Christ, an example to others. But he is still inexperienced. And so, shortly before his death, the apostle Paul gives his last instructions to this young soldier to prepare him for the battlefield.

Timothy must not be over optimistic. Things won't go smooth in the churches. The church is being attacked from all sides and Timothy will have to stand firm.

The apostle wants Timothy to be prepared, and so he gives him a vivid picture of the times in which they live.

The deformation is already creeping in. Many co-workers and preachers have forsaken Paul.

“...all those in Asia have turned away from me...” – chapter 1:15.

He speaks there of the Roman province “Asia”, which had Ephesus as capital.

The shepherds of those churches were ashamed of Paul. None of them was willing to risk their life in supporting Paul in his trial.

Timothy knows this, because these men are from the churches where Timothy is serving.

The apostle Paul mentions some of these deserters by their name. Only Onesiphorus came to support Paul and was not ashamed of his imprisonment in chains. But the rest all forsook him. Even his co-worker, Demas, forsook him, because he loved this present world. Demas was not willing to risk his life for the gospel.

At the beginning of chapter 3 the apostle gives a description of the time in which they live. The decay of the last days is already present in the church. Many church members have become lovers of themselves and lovers of money and lovers of this world. They still have the outward appearance of religion, but the power of true godliness is absent from their lives. They are unholy. Yes, they are church members, even church leaders, but they do not know the power of Christ that renews us unto godliness.

Timothy, from such people you must turn away!

The teachings of false teachers are already spreading like cancer. Again Paul mentions some of these false teachers by their names – Hymenaeus and Philetus. Such evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But, as for you, Timothy, **you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of.**

The decline and the deformation in the churches have already started, and the struggle will continue to become even harder. In this context Timothy is exhorted to stand firm and to

continue in the doctrine and the conduct which he learned from holy Scripture and from the apostle himself.

Cling to the doctrine of the holy writings; grow in the knowledge of these Scriptures. You have to proclaim **that** Word, the Word of God, in a time in which sound teaching and sound doctrine has become extremely unpopular – even among church members.

Instead of listening to sound doctrine they will gather for themselves preachers according to their own desires to tickle their ears. That is: to flatter them, to please them, and to say things that they will like to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and will prefer to listen to interesting stories, rather than to listen to sound doctrine (chapter 4:3, 4).

The time has come that the churches will gather for themselves preachers to preach to them what **they** would like to hear – and that, according to the apostle, will not be sound doctrine, not exposition of the truth, but storytelling, fables, and things that tickle the ear of the hearers.

May we never develop itchy ears!

You are living in a dangerous time, Timothy, for the time of the last days has commenced. The “last days” is the total period between Christ’s first coming and His second coming.

And these last days will be characterised by spiritual decay in the churches. Many church members will have nothing more than an outward appearance of religion.

This is not something that will happen far in the future. Timothy was already living in the last days, and therefore **he** is exhorted that **he** has to turn away from these godless people. Timothy, beware, for the time of deformation and deception has already begun.

The young man, Timothy, must also know that the same suffering that God’s children had to bear in the Old Testament from **false** brothers will continue in the New Testament.

But, Timothy, **you** have carefully followed my doctrine and my manner of life.

Evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. The road of heresy and of sin is downhill, and it will gain momentum. But as for you, you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of.

What then are these things which Timothy received and of which he is assured? What has Timothy learned which he may never forget again, in which he has to continue till the end of his life?

We note that in the second place...

Timothy's education

“...you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra – what persecutions I endured! And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” – verses 10 – 12.

Timothy became a real disciple; not only of Paul's doctrine, but also of his manner of life. He suffered the same persecutions and afflictions when he joined Paul on his mission journeys. Timothy's education in Christ was not theoretical philosophies. It was the real thing. He followed Christ in everyday life, enduring the hardships, suffering persecution, exercising faith and longsuffering. He followed the apostle in all things, driven by the same love. And through many sufferings he learned what it means to persevere.

When Timothy read these words, vivid pictures must have come to his mind: a crowd at Antioch, shouting and cursing, chasing Paul away and banning him from the city; a violent attempt to abuse and stone him at Iconium; at Lystra raging men stoning Paul and dragging him outside the city; leaving him for dead.

Yes, Timothy knows what is meant with the words longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions and afflictions. He has become not only a student of the doctrine, but a disciple.

He knows what it means to follow Christ.

Timothy's life stands in sharp contrast with the other names mentioned in this letter. Except for the name of Onesiphorus who was not ashamed of Paul's imprisonment, all the church leaders were too ashamed of Paul's chains. It was too humiliating and risky to support Paul in his trial. But Timothy was taught differently. He knew that Christ cannot be followed without His cross.

If anyone desires an easy life in this world, he will not be able to follow Christ. If you are seeking an easy life in this world, sooner or later you will deny Christ.

For Demas this present life was too precious.

Timothy, however, did follow.

He carefully followed the apostle's doctrine. Paul's teaching was not the teaching of men. As an apostle of Christ his doctrine was the revealed Word of God.

This doctrine has changed Timothy's whole manner of life and made him a new creation in Christ. This doctrine changes lives.

Now, in order to urge Timothy to continue in this doctrine, the apostle reminds Timothy that he is not an ignorant and untaught soldier. Paul took him through a long course of training, not only in the doctrine – which comes first – but also gave himself to Timothy as an example of that conduct that befits the gospel.

Timothy became well-acquainted with **the purpose** of all Paul's labour. As Paul puts it in chapter 2:10:

“...I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory”.

He is willing to suffer and endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they may all be instructed in the gospel and may receive eternal glory in Christ Jesus.

And then the apostle says something that may seem strange to many who desire an easy life in this world. He says that **everyone** who wants to follow Christ, every believer, will suffer persecution.

“...**all** who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” –
verse 12.

Not only the ministers and the elders, but everyone who wants to live godly!

It runs like a golden thread throughout this letter. In this same epistle the apostle tells Timothy:

“...do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His
prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel...” – 1: 8

And again he says:

“For this reason I suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed...” –
1: 12.

And again he urges Timothy:

“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” –
2: 3.

As we said, these exhortations are not meant only for ministers and elders. When Paul went through Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the believers, he exhorted them to continue in the faith, saying:

“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” – Acts 14: 22.

He warns every believer that we all have to enter the kingdom through many tribulations.

And of course the persecutions will not always come with violence. Very often it comes to us in the form of slander, mocking or rejection.

These tribulations were part of Timothy’s training. By these things he was instructed in patience, in love, and in perseverance.

And **such** is the life of everyone who follows Christ.

Maybe you are a bit jealous when you think of Timothy. None of us had the privilege of being taught by an apostle.

And yet, do we not receive exactly the same teaching when we study these words of the apostle? Are we not acquainted with all the things which Paul experienced on his mission journeys? Do we not know the purpose of his life, and did he not also become an example to us of longsuffering and love and perseverance?

Surely we too received the same instruction and are well-acquainted with the apostle’s manner of life. Through personal Bible study, through the catechism classes, through the preaching of God’s Word we have all become students of the same doctrine; and we too are called to become followers, disciples of Christ.

The foundation of Timothy’s faith was laid very early in his life. He was a covenant child, and he received covenant education. He had a grandmother Lois in whom the genuine faith dwelt, and a mother Eunice who instructed him in the holy Scriptures since he was a little child.

And of course, Timothy was also personally trained by an apostle of Christ. The apostle reminds him of this when he says:

“...continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the holy Scriptures...”

This doesn't sound very progressive, does it? Timothy is not to invent a new gospel. He must continue in those things which he was taught since he was a little child.

Again this is said in contrast to those evil men who seem to be very progressive.

“...evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of...”

Dear congregation, we find the same also in our own day. There are some who claim to be very progressive. They are **too** progressive to stick to old truths. They seek a Christianity that fits into the changing times of our day; a Christianity that keeps up with every change in society. And every change and every adjustment they like to call “reformation”! Progress! Yes, they do make progress – from bad to worse.

They are scared to death that the church might be behind the time or that the church may even get stuck on old theology. They reckon themselves to be wiser than all who have gone before them.

The Spirit of God started to work the day when they were born!

They even reckon themselves to be more educated and more scientific than the apostles. We know so much more today. With the knowledge of modern science – how can we still believe the first chapters of Genesis!

These progressive men, as is always the case, will grow – but from bad to worse.

But **you** must continue in the things which you have learned, **even from your childhood**.

Paul is not teaching that one has to follow blindly the traditions of the fathers. But he does emphasise the importance of covenant education. A child knows his parents, and if they are truly God-fearing, the child will know. He will see in their lives the power of God's grace, the power of the gospel. And thus the impact of the gospel will be all the more powerful when he receives it from them whom he knows, and trusts, and honours.

At the same time Paul is not teaching Timothy to put any trust in the teachings of men. The reason why Timothy has been assured of the things that he was taught, and the reason why he has to continue in that assurance, is because it is rooted in the Scriptures.

Also the authority of Paul's teaching was clearly not in himself, but in Christ, whose Word he spoke.

Timothy could be assured of what he has learned, also for another reason: because the gospel preached by Paul was the same doctrine which Timothy has learned **from the Old Testament** since he was a child. Timothy knows that the gospel which is proclaimed by Paul is indeed the fulfilment of these Scriptures. It is no other gospel, but the same gospel which has been preached through all the ages by all the prophets. It is no new invented message.

Dear congregation, if anyone has been instructed in the ideas and traditions of men, he ought **not** to persevere in it, if it is not the Word of God. On the contrary, we ought to **unlearn** all that we have learned apart from Christ, if we wish to be His disciples.

But, dear young people, if God has given you parents in whom the genuine faith dwells, parents who instructed you with the Word of God, if you were so blessed by the LORD to have parents who instructed you in the holy Scriptures from your childhood, then you surely have to continue in their teaching.

However, the apostle is not satisfied to mention only the source of revelation, which is the holy Scriptures, he also states for what ***purpose*** these divine writings have been given to us.

We will note that in the third place...

The profit of holy Scripture

“...from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” – verse 15.

It is the ***holy*** Scriptures. It comes from the holy God, was delivered by holy men, contain holy doctrine, and its very purpose is to make us holy through faith in Christ Jesus.

Salvation in Christ – that is a whole new life in holy communion with God and with one another.

By these Scriptures we are not only lead to faith in Christ, but by the same Scriptures we are also nourished with Christ and instructed in Him so that we also walk in the way of salvation.

It is profitable for:

“...doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Did you hear that?

The apostle does not say: Scripture is profitable if you seek for an extraordinary experience, or profitable for excitement, or to give you good feelings, or simply to save your private individual soul.

No, all Scripture is given to the church. It functions within a covenant community where there are parents and children, shepherds and sheep; a community where you may expect to be instructed in righteousness, where you may also expect to be reproved if necessary, where you may also be corrected. This Word of God comes with authority. It reproveth not

on the basis of private opinion, but with the authority of God. Those who are called to preach this Word, are called to reprove and to instruct with the authoritative Word of God. And this divine Word, Scripture, is designed for this purpose: to instruct. It is profitable for doctrine, to teach and instruct, to reprove and rebuke, to correct and to guide us.

The apostle could have mentioned many things in this list. He could have said that Scripture is profitable to comfort us. But here his focus does not seem to be on comfort. And we may ask: why? Was Timothy not in desperate need for comfort? Surely he was, for he was suffering persecution and much opposition.

The apostle could also have mentioned that all Scripture is profitable for making us happy. And would that not be true? Blessed, happy, is the man who delights himself in the law of the LORD. And surely our hearts are burning with hope and excitement when the words of Scripture become clear to us.

But again, the apostle seems to focus on something different.

Scripture is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in the way of righteousness.

Is this not a bit too dogmatic? Doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction!? Is Scripture not profitable for a lot of other things?

Dear congregation, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit the apostle has mentioned the most important things, without excluding the rest.

And if these things which he mentions here are the main things for which Scripture is profitable, then it simply means that God Himself reckons these things to be important.

He mentions doctrine first. And then he mentions *reproof*. We may however translate the Greek word with *refutation*. Scripture is profitable for refutation – that is: for refuting false doctrine. And so the first two things that he mentions are: the teaching of sound doctrine and the refutation of false doctrine. That means there is right and wrong, true and false. And Scripture is given with the purpose to teach us this distinction.

The third thing that he mentions is correction. Holy Scripture is profitable to point out error and to correct it.

The fourth thing that he mentions is instruction. Instruction in righteousness – that is: instruction how to live righteous.

Not only instruction how to go to heaven. No, instruction in righteousness. Instruction with regard to God's holy will for all of our life.

And it is by this doctrine, refutation, correction and instruction, he says, that we are thoroughly equipped for every good work!

Without sound doctrine you are not fit for any good work.

It is this Word that equips you for all of life.

There are many in our day that become enthusiastic about this project or that activity. They are active Christians. Doers, they say. They do a lot of good work, it is said. But they are not excited about doctrine, or teaching.

Forget about all that, they say, and let us just do the job! Forget about all the teaching and come down to real life!

But without the sound doctrine, refutation, correction and instruction of Scripture, no good work is possible. Then there may be many works, but no good works.

Good works can only follow where sound doctrine leads.

Scripture, with its doctrine, refutation, correction and instruction, equips us thoroughly for every good work – yes, for all of life.

God has given all of Scripture for doctrine, refutation, correction, and instruction.

Is that how you view Scripture? Is that the purpose for which you study it? Is that what you expect to receive at the catechism classes? Is that what you expect to receive in the preaching – doctrine, refutation, correction, instruction in righteousness?

Dear congregation, if these words were written to those who live in the last days, then they are now even more applicable in our day than 2 000 years ago. For, the whole intention of Paul's warning is to make clear that the last days will *increasingly* become harder as heresies and deformation will spread like cancer. This deformation will reach its climax just before the return of our Lord.

That is also how the rest of Scripture pictures the last days.

The entire period of the last days is called a time of great oppression and great deception (Mt. 24; Rev. 7: 14).

There may be short periods of rest and peace, but they are usually followed by storms that shake the church to its foundations.

Satan, the enemy of Christ and the enemy of the church, is indeed at work.

Therefore the apostle reminds Timothy of the things which he has learned and been assured of. He exhorts him to continue steadfastly in the doctrine and instruction of Scripture which he received, and to seek nothing apart from this divine authoritative Word of God, which will equip him completely for every good work.

Dear congregation, shortly we will witness the public profession of young members who received the same doctrine as Timothy, who are also assured of the truth of the instruction they received. They are ready to confess it as their own. And therefore they will promise that, by the grace of God, they will continue steadfastly to the end of their life in the things that they have learned.

For this we thank the Lord for His grace, for He alone was able to work this faith. And so, with them, our joy is in the Lord and in His mercy.

But we celebrate and we rejoice in the midst of a spiritual war. They will need our prayers and support.

Let us with them continue in the doctrine of holy Scripture. Let us reject the plausible theories of men, and let us not develop itchy ears to hear what pleases us, but let us as a congregation give heed to **God's** Word alone – to its doctrine, its refutation, its correction, its instruction in the way of righteousness.

Dear young people, the Word of God is our greatest treasure. Its doctrine and instruction is unto life eternal, and also for **this** life, here and now, it will equipped you, yes, thoroughly equip you, for every good work.

Continue, therefore, in the things which you have learned, and been assured of.

Amen.