

Continuing in What We Learned as Children

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Tonight, we open up the Holy Bible and turn to 2 Timothy chapter 3. Let's read the chapter.

1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. 2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, 4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; 5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. 6 For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, 7 Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. 8 Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. 9 But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was. 10 But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, 11 Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. 12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. 13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. 14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; 15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

This is the inspired Word of God.

The text for our sermon is verses 14 and 15.

14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; 15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Continue. Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, continue. The main word of the apostle Paul to the young pastor Timothy is continue. What a great privilege Timothy had, for Timothy was given something as a little boy growing up in the city of Lystra in Asia Minor, something that very few boys in the Roman Empire ever had, a godly upbringing in the scriptures. The history of Acts 16 makes plain that Timothy had an unbelieving Gentile father, but a godly mother and grandmother, and they are named in 2 Timothy 1 verse 5, Eunice his mother and Lois his grandmother. And Eunice and Lois saw to it that little Timothy was reared in the scriptures.

Now when Paul writes this epistle to him, he's no longer a little boy, but he's a young pastor in the very big and wicked city of Ephesus and Paul's the spiritual father, Timothy is the spiritual son, and the father says to his son, now a pastor in the ministry, "Continue, continue in the things you learned when you were a little child." And that's God's word to Tyler and to all the friends here and to all of us, continue in the things you were taught. God be thanked and God be praised tonight for his covenant faithfulness because the exhortation "continue" implies something. You've had a beginning. You have God-fearing parents and grandparents who reared you in the Christian faith and taught you the scriptures from your earliest days. Many people grow up and they never have a God-fearing father or mother. They never get taught the scriptures, but you have. And because God loves us and he's with us and he cares for us, he not only gives us children and gives us to teach them the scriptures, but now he says continue, and the mighty means of God to cause us to continue is the proclamation of his word and the exhortation of the text, which flows out of the gospel. "Continue. People of God, continue." And the Holy Spirit takes that word and he carries it right into the heart and he makes it effectual so that, like Timothy, we do continue in the Holy scriptures.

But that word also serves as a warning tonight, "Don't stop now, and worse, don't turn aside from the gospel and the truth of the scriptures." Some have. Some make what appears to be a very good beginning. They're reared in a covenant home. They go to a good Christian school. They're taught Catechism. They may even make confession of faith. And they turn aside from all of it and forsake the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul even mentioned one by name in his life, chapter 4, verse 10, "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." And probably all of us could name some names and that's not to gloat. It's very sobering. That's humbling that there are some who appear to make a good beginning, but they don't continue. And so there's a warning that comes with the main word, "Continue." Continue. We don't want it to be your name. Continue in what you were taught as a child. So let's look at that word tonight out of 2 Timothy 3. We'll take as our theme "Continuing in What We Learned as Children." Let's consider, first of all, the meaning; in the second place, the reason; and then third, the exhortation.

As a child, Timothy learned the holy scriptures. Verse 14 says, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned," and then that general term, "things," becomes more specific in verse 15, where we read, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures." So if we put them together, Timothy learned the things that were contained in the holy scriptures.

The scriptures, that word in the original simply means writings, and obviously for Timothy, it was the books of the Old Testament because the New Testament books were not yet written and completed. But for us tonight, the writings are the 66 canonical books of the Old and New Testament, the scriptures, the Word of God.

And now the text calls the scriptures holy, and that word holy simply means set apart, so that the scriptures are the one collection of writing that are set apart from all other writings. There's a lot of writings You take all the writings of all men throughout all history, all authors, all storytellers, all the writings of the false religions, and you can take all the good spiritual writings within the church, the writings of church councils, the writings of ministers, the writings of believers. We have all the writings of history, the Word of God calls the scriptures holy because they are now set apart from all other writings and they're set apart because they and they alone are word for word, the very Word of God. Inspired. God breathed, the next verse says, authoritative for all matters of faith and life, sufficient, perspicuous, come back to that a little bit. There's nothing like the scriptures as the Word of God. Timothy knew the scriptures, and the scriptures, too, are able to make us wise unto salvation. They are unique. They are to be revered.

Timothy not only knew the scriptures, but verse 14 says he knew the things, that is, the things contained in the scriptures. So he had the Old Testament scriptures, he knew the history, how God chose a shepherd boy and made him the king of Israel. He knew the stories of the Old Testament, how Noah built an ark, how Jonah was swallowed by a great fish. He knew the facts of the scriptures, how God brought one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, there were 10 of them, 10 plagues upon Egypt. He knew the doctrines of the scripture, for example, substitutionary atonement and when I put this lamb on the altar, said the Old Testament Israelite, in my place, that's a picture of Jesus dying in my place for my sins. Timothy memorized, you can be sure, he memorized sections of the scriptures, especially the Psalms, so that he could say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name." He knew the things of the scriptures. He knew God revealed in the scriptures the God of judgment who brought those plagues, the God of the seed of the woman, the God of grace and faithfulness to Israel, and he knew that God as his God personally.

Timothy knew the things of the scriptures and regarding these things, he had the personal assurance of faith. Verse 14, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of." And we keep reading in verse 15, "and that from a child thou hast known," not learned in verse 15, but now it's known, and that from a child thou has known with a experiential saving personal knowledge of faith, "thou has known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith, which is in

Christ Jesus." And faith isn't simply knowledge. Faith is hearty confidence. It's assurance. Timothy had personal assurance.

That jumped out of the text this past week when I was working with it. I didn't come to the text because of it, but it jumped out after, and that's because last Sunday I was preaching in Dune, Iowa and after church, I gathered with a number of couples for fellowship, and there was a woman there who was telling me how thankful she is that God brought her into the Dune Protestant Reformed Church because in her youth, she grew up in another Reformed Church that denies assurance and teaches that ordinary believers do not have personal assurance of their salvation but in the church, only a few older members actually have assurance and may come to the Lord's Supper. She said that she was taught in her youth that we may make a profession of the objective things of the scriptures but there's only a few who can make a personal profession that these things are true for me personally. And she said that when she was young, she was taught the Heidelberg Catechism and her minister told everyone in the class that the personal pronouns, I and me, in the Heidelberg Catechism, those are referring to believers in the abstract. That's not necessarily referring to any of you catechumens. And so when they memorize Lord's Day 1, "My only comfort is that I'm not my own, but I belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ," that's not something for each one of you to say as being true for you personally. That's true for believers. Now maybe someday it will be true for you. And my soul was empty. And I'm so thankful to God to be able to have personal assurance of faith, she said, and to be taught the doctrine of assurance.

Why would Eunice, why would Lois teach Timothy the scriptures if they can't take the things of the gospel and apply them to Timothy personally? Why would they take the time to teach him the Psalms? "Little Timothy, listen, now we're going to learn Psalm 27. Let's say it together. The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? Now you may not necessarily say that about yourself, Timothy, but believers out there can say that." Why would they teach him the scriptures? Our God is so good and so faithful in his covenant that he not only gives to the children of the covenant an intellectual knowledge of the things of scripture, but he gives a hearty, assured, personal confidence that these things are true for me. And that was the case with Timothy and so Paul can say in verse 14, "But continue thou in the things which thou has learned and hast been assured of." Timothy had assurance growing up.

Timothy knew the holy scriptures according to verse 15, as a child, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures." He didn't know the holy scriptures because he was born with a natural knowledge of the scriptures. And he didn't know the scriptures because he just happened to have a natural gravitation toward the scriptures while the other boys liked to go to the fishing hole, he wanted to read a scroll, or he asked Mother if he could go to the synagogue and have scribes read to him the scriptures. No, he had to be taught.

He had to be taught. And he was. Verse 14, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them." And he

could be taught. Now back to that descriptive term, perspicuous. He could be taught, because the scriptures are, you learn this in Essentials of Reformed Doctrine, perspicuous. That word simply means clear. The main message of the Bible, it can be understood even by little children. It's clear. He could know it, and he did know it.

He was taught, not by his father. His father was an unbelieving Gentile. But he had godly instructors, Timothy did, his mother, Eunice, his grandmother, Lois, and later on in life, a missionary named Paul. That's a pretty strong trio, a godly mother, a godly grandmother, and a godly pastor. That's what Timothy had and they taught him the holy scriptures.

Now, what's so striking in the text is that the word "child" in verse 15 literally refers to an unborn or newborn babe. We find that word, for example, in Luke 1:41, "And it came to pass that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb." Luke 2, verse 12, "Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." Babe. Now obviously a babe cannot receive instruction and a babe doesn't have a conscious faith to be able to know and understand the things of the scriptures, so the text's use of that word "babe" evidently is communicating to us the idea that the whole atmosphere of Timothy's home was permeated with the scriptures, that the unbelieving father didn't control the home and its atmosphere, Eunice did, and she saw to it, "This is going to be a covenant home." And then from the time little Timothy was born and wrapped up in blankets, before he could ever be taught, it was the scriptures that permeated his home. So his little infant ears were not hearing what some many infant ears hear. It makes you shudder the music and the entertainment and the language of the pagan Ephesian culture. Or his little ears were not regularly subjected to yelling and boasting and bickering and lying and swearing, but permeating the air of his home were the words of scripture. The scriptures read, Lois and Eunice singing the scriptures, all the conversations in harmony with the scriptures. And then as he aged to a little toddler, Eunice and Lois would sit down with the little guy and they would open up the scriptures and teach him and he would learn about Daniel in the lions' den and all of the things of the scriptures.

"And from a babe thou hast known the holy scriptures." What an encouragement that is for us as parents to continue not only teaching the scriptures, but already before that, to make the atmosphere of our home one permeated with the scriptures. And if God gave grace to her to do it, she didn't have a husband by her side, he was unbelieving, if he gave grace to her to do it, he will give grace to us also. He was taught.

But these women and Paul, they were only instruments. Jesus taught him and that comes out in verse 14 when we read, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom," and that's a singular pronoun, whom, "knowing of whom thou hast learned them." And that "of whom" is ultimately Jesus. Timothy was taught by Jesus, taught of Jesus; not only taught about Jesus, really, he was taught by Jesus because Eunice and Lois and Paul were simply instruments through whom Jesus himself taught Timothy.

And so when we teach our children the Bible and when we sit down in our homes and read with them and talk about the scriptures with them and ask questions, have devotions, bedtime devotions, and there's Sunday school, school, Catechism, the worship services, the atmosphere of our home even driving in the car, what we're listening to in the car, when we have the scriptures in our life, Christ himself is teaching the children through the scriptures. And of course, that explains then why Timothy would grow up and have faith and the assurance of faith. Father and mother or grandfather and grandmother, we can't give a hearty confidence to our children so that they actually believe and have assurance but Jesus can. And Jesus taught him through the instrumentality of this trio, "knowing of whom thou hast learned these things."

So thanks to instruction, Paul could say of Timothy those lovely words of verse 15, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures." There will be heavy judgment. There will be heavy judgment upon negligent and unfaithful parents who do not train their children in the scriptures so that their child has to grow up and say, "And that from a child, I never knew the scriptures." Thanks be to God that we can say tonight what could be said of Timothy, "And that from a child." Most children don't have that. "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures."

"Now continue," Paul says to Timothy, "continue in these things. Don't forsake them, study them, grow in them, learn in them, recite them, confess them, witness of them, live out of the scriptures which you were taught as a child." That's the meaning of the text. Why? What's the reason? Why should Timothy continue in the scriptures which he learned from his youth? Why? Because the scriptures "are able to make thee wise unto salvation." Verse 15, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Wisdom is taking the knowledge of your faith and applying it to your life so that you live for the glory of God. That's wisdom. By nature, we don't have any of it. As we are by nature, we are so foolish. We don't have the knowledge of faith, and whatever knowledge we do have that we can gain about God through the creation, we won't apply that to a life for God's glory. We're foolish and wicked, and so we pursue what is base and idolatrous and selfish, foolish, and therefore, we'll only make foolish choices regarding our finances, our career, dating, marriage, how we will live in the United States, how we will respond to our Creator, how we will interact with the gospel of Jesus. By nature, we're fools and all we do is make foolish choices, so we need wisdom to orient the whole of our life unto God.

The scriptures, verse 15, are able, literally, they're powerful to make thee wise. You don't have wisdom, but they're powerful to make thee wise. God is powerful through the scriptures to make thee wise unto salvation. This should make the scriptures the most highly sought after possession in the whole world. There's nothing like the scriptures. In fact, already in the Old Testament, when all you have, and now in Timothy's day, all you have is the Old Testament scriptures. There's nothing like them because they are able to make thee wise unto salvation. Only the scriptures will give us the right knowledge of God, our Savior, that though he is a very holy and just God who hates sin and punishes sinners, in his love he has provided Jesus as the propitiation for our sins. Only the

scriptures will give you the right knowledge of yourself as one who needs salvation, that you are very foolish, corrupt, and guilty before God. You need a Savior. Only the scriptures will give to us the saving knowledge of Jesus as the Savior. There is salvation, but there is salvation in one only. His name is Jesus, crucified and raised from the dead, having merited salvation for all of God's people. Only the scriptures give us the true knowledge of salvation and will point us to the cross and say, "Go to the cross. There's refuge in the cross. The love of God is revealed in the cross. Look at you, you poor sinner, you're in bondage to your sin. You don't have any freedom. You're guilty in your sin. To the cross, sinner, to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ." In making us wise unto salvation, the scriptures teach us the doctrine of salvation, the truth of salvation, the final glory of salvation, and the scriptures then also teach us the way of salvation, the way that those who are saved live, the holy, self-denying, cross-bearing way of self-denial in thankful obedience to God. Only the scriptures have the power to make thee wise unto salvation. Continue in them for that reason.

The young pastor Timothy will see that in Ephesus. It's a very big and very wicked city where he's pastor. He'll see that as he walks through the streets. Without the scriptures every man is a fool unto destruction. No one has wisdom unto salvation. When you walk around the city of Ephesus, there goes that man, following in the philosophy of the Epicureans. And here goes that man in sexual lust, he's going to the temple again to visit the temple prostitute. And there he goes. And here goes this man. His name is Demetrius. He builds these little silver shrines for the goddess Diana. And there he goes. His name is Sceva. He's a Jewish exorcist. He tries to cast out demons. He's got seven sons. There he goes. And here go all these men with their books of the curious arts and superstition and idolatry. All through the city of Ephesus, fools without the scriptures going in the way of destruction and damnation and we see the exact same thing today.

Only the scriptures "are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." The scriptures will never ever make you wise unto salvation unless you have been given faith Christ Jesus. If you do not have faith in Christ Jesus, then you will have the scriptures and say, "This is pretty boring. Probably a hundred other things I'd rather do than read the Bible." If you do not have faith in Jesus Christ, then you will open up the scriptures and just mindlessly page through them. And if you do not have faith in Christ Jesus, then you will open up the scriptures and read and say, "This is a joke. You've got to be kidding. All things were created in six days? And you're telling me that a man was living inside of the belly of a great fish? And that a man was raised from the dead? This is nonsense." And if you do not have faith in Christ Jesus, then you will open up the scriptures and you will start twisting them and manipulating them to try to support your agenda. And if you do not have faith in Christ Jesus, you'll go to the scriptures and you'll start pulling out things you can argue about. Many people like Judas Iscariot had the scriptures and they read the scriptures, but they didn't have faith in Christ Jesus and therefore they continued in the foolish way of self-destruction, putting their hope in themselves or someone else. But if you have faith in Christ Jesus, that means Jesus died for you and he obtained for you that precious gift of faith, and by his Holy Spirit, he breathes that gift into you so that you're not only connected to Jesus, but you actually know him, believe in him, and trust in him. And then when you open up the scriptures,

you see Jesus. You see the riches and the glory of God revealed in Jesus, and you adore him, and you love him and your heart is so warm that you are a wretched good-for-nothing sinner who should be destroyed everlastingly but look at what the scriptures say. God is so favorable to me in Christ Jesus.

Faith which is in Christ Jesus, that's the most important gospel word of the text. If you don't have faith in Christ Jesus, you don't have anything. You young people, you can have the whole world but if you do not have faith in Jesus, I can't give that to you. Your parents can't give that to you. That's the one thing that we pray for all our days, that God will give our children faith, the wonder of faith, and strengthen that faith because we can open up the Bible and teach you every day of your life, and it won't mean anything. Actually, it will serve your greater condemnation if you don't believe it. But faith, isn't it so precious to have faith, to believe the holy scriptures?

"The scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Continue in them. Continue." Why? "They're able to make thee wise." And then that reason is underscored and made urgent by, "But." The beginning of the text in verse 14, "But," for the preceding verse says, "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." And now the text begins, "But, but over against all those deceivers, but now in great urgency because of those deceivers who will try to lead you in the way of destruction, continue in the holy scriptures." We're not strong in ourselves to detect and to resist deceivers. We can easily be led astray by deception because of our own natural folly and our itching ears that want to hear some new thing, to be infatuated by some new thing, and evil men who can sound very Reformed and may even quote Reformed creeds are very eloquent and very intelligent and very passionate can get us all excited about some deception and can draw people away from the Church of Jesus Christ to their own cause. Deceivers. It doesn't matter if any of you go to college, what college you go to, if it's Christian, Cornerstone, Calvin, or if it's a secular college, GRCC, GVSU, you will hear falsehood and the arguments supporting it are so crafty either to manipulate the scriptures to try to support some theory of evolution or some idea of an earthly millennial kingdom in the future, or to manipulate your emotions with all those isms. Feminism. Transgenderism. Cultural Marxism. And the list goes on and on and on. There are people the age of you young people right now who are mutilating their bodies looking for sex reassignment surgeries because they're saying, "I am not this sex. I want to be that sex." And so males are trying to be females and females are trying to be males, and literally permanently removing the anatomy that God gave them, self-mutilization. And how does this happen? This is unimaginable that someone would actually do this. Do they just come up with this on their own? That one day they say, "You know, I'm going to try to be the other sex." Evil men. Evil men and seducers are waxing worse and worse and leading people astray and soon he will appear, the man of sin, the Antichrist, the great deceiver, and if it were possible, he would deceive even the very elect. Deceivers. How will you stand your ground without the scriptures? How will you be wise unto salvation without the scriptures? How will you be able to try every spirit and weigh it, "Is this the thing of God? Is this right or is this wrong," without the scriptures?

And now we come full circle all the way back to the main word of the text, which is it's exhortation, continue. Verse 14, "But continue thou." You young people are so blessed, so so blessed. You've been taught the Bible from your earliest days. The things of the Bible, you think about all of the memory verses that you've had in your life. I was reflecting on that this week just trying to randomly pick some grade, let's say third grade. You think of all the Bible verses, the songs that are memorized in one grade in school, in Catechism, in the home, start adding them all up, just one grade. We have been taught so much. You have been thoroughly trained in the scriptures, especially in Catechism, in very important specific things of the scriptures like the nature of the covenant. Is it conditional for elect and reprobate or is it unconditional for the elect alone? You've been taught the things of marriage and the life-long bond of marriage. You've learned so many things out of the scriptures from your childhood and now do you see the great danger that you young people are in right now in what is arguably the most critical time in your spiritual life? Because you made a confession of faith and now you're finished with Catechism forever. Formal Catechism instruction. And you graduated Friday night, and you are finished now with your formal education in a Protestant Reformed school, which you've had since kindergarten. You're finished. And maybe you will soon move on out of young peoples. You think about that. Everything you were taught in Catechism, everything you were taught at school, everything you were taught at home. Now you're finished with Catechism, you're finished with our Christian schools. How are you going to make up for that massive amount of spiritual intake that's suddenly gone? You have this massive hole in your life now. Where's that going to come from?

This is a critical moment. Do you hear the exhortation of the apostle? Continue. You've had such a marvelous beginning. It's so beautiful. Continue in the things you learned. And you can make that really practical and concrete, personal devotions and constantly evaluating the strategies for your personal devotions. Is your reading of the Bible every day profitable or not? Let's talk. Let's evaluate. Are there different strategies? Attendance in the divine worship services. Continue. Everyone needs a church Bible study. We need to study the Bible more than just by ourselves. Continue. Everyone needs to do some reading, and if you're blind, well, you can listen then to reading. And there's so many good things to read. You can start a book club with your friends and hold each other accountable. Continue.

I was struck in my ministry by how many adults would say, "I wish I could go back to the essentials of Reformed doctrine Catechism class. You know, the definitions, the doctrine, the distinctions, the categories. They start to get kind of fuzzy." Well, God leads us sometimes through church controversy. That really helps start sharpening things up. But continue. We can still go back to the Catechism book. Continue and read and study and then don't underestimate the value of memorization. Memorizing the scriptures. Continue. You've been given a good beginning. Don't let it fall away. Continue. You'll be spiritually vulnerable if you don't continue. How easy prey you will be for deceivers if you don't continue. Continue. How will there be wisdom unto salvation out of the scriptures if we do not continue in the scriptures? How will we grow from childish immaturity to maturity to full adulthood without continuing in the scriptures? And every year that exhortation becomes more urgent because as the chapter begins, last perilous

days and apostasy and deceivers waxing worse and worse. Can't you hear the apostle to Timothy, the young pastor, "Timothy, continue thou." And thanks be to God as the beginning and as the end, so the whole middle is of God, the sovereign God. The God who gives us the beginning is the God who brings us along and causes us to continue all the way to the end, who takes that word "continue" and he makes it effectual by bringing it right into the heart so that you want to continue, and by his grace you remain in the scriptures as Timothy did. And maybe for some of you men, as Timothy did, continuing in the scriptures and right into the ministry. Continue in the things you learned as little children. May God grant it. Amen.

Let us pray.

Father in heaven, we thank thee for thy word, the scriptures, their depth, their clarity, their beauty, their power, and that we have them in our language so that with very little effort we can open them up and read and understand. May we do that and, Lord, continue to give us the proclamation of the gospel out of the scriptures. Give to us faith and the assurance of faith so that we do not doubt but are firmly persuaded of our own personal salvation and then may we make a confession everywhere we go to the praise of thy glorious grace. For Jesus' sake. Amen.