

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The Apostle writes as Bishop to Bishop Timothy, the Pastor's Pastor. In rhetorical presentation, the Apostle lays before his son in the faith opposites, that from those opposites Timothy discern, judge, choose, what to believe and how to live as he carries out the duties of his Office.

So for you, you who hear the Apostolic Word this day, to you Scripture opens the Episcopal Counsel of the Apostle born out of due time to those who hold the Pastoral Office, that you learn from his life and practice, that you find guidance and comfort in the Pastoral wisdom accrued by the author of 13 Books of the New Testament, wisdom that included having St. Timothy circumcised.

Paul's Episcopal admonition has as its background the last days, and the sufferings that St. Paul endured, persecutions he endured at Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, Timothy's home town, cities in southern Galatia where he preached the Gospel on his first Missionary Journey. So Paul's Pastoral Theology as presented to St. Timothy is Apostolic *Didache* set in Christian persecution awaiting the *Parousia*.

Most of you have seen the Apostle's prophecy proven true. All of you who are Ordained into the Office that Timothy held, the Pastoral Office, know well what that: "In the last days perilous times will come... yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution..."

That said, the Second Epistle to St. Timothy isn't a treatise on being a victim. Saving faith isn't like that. St. Paul presents, in matter-of-fact language, what you too have seen to be true of the world in which the Church is found in the latter days of this season of grace: evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. Some will find places in your pews and your voters' assemblies. Some will find places in the pulpit and before the altar.

The fallen world provides sufficient tribulation for the Church from the outside. Unbelief, gender fluidity, perversion as normal and right, man as the spawn of apes or aliens, and the cheapening of human life beat against the hull of the Ark of the Church trying to sink her.

And as the fallen world sneaks into the visible church, lies war against Truth, and strife shatters the peace and amity of Christian fellowship. The faithful Pastor is found to be a dinosaur, a relic from the mores and morals of an ancient time, an artifact incompatible with modern thought and culture, a preacher of fables and doctrines the world rejects.

You, with every Christian, have experienced what St. Paul writes. Perhaps you haven't put a basket over the Lamp of the Gospel to "fit in". Perhaps you haven't been shamed into going along with the world to avoid persecution or embarrassment, or simply to be liked by others. Or perhaps you have done exactly that, or at least wanted to, which is to say you have been tempted by the pressures of the sin-filled world. And tempted, sin lies at the door, and its desire is for you. But you should rule over it.

Hear then, and find strength in St. Paul's Words to St. Timothy: "...you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of.. for you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Do not be conformed to the world. Follow carefully the Apostolic Doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith,

longsuffering, love, and perseverance. Stand in the Truth of the Holy Scriptures. For the promise of the Apostle is true also for you – out of all tribulations the Lord will deliver you. You have His Promise. And His Promise is sure.

That the Lord will deliver you doesn't mean that you will avoid suffering. Quite the contrary. At times it may look like the world has won, as if you've suffered great loss, as if your reputation has been irreparably damaged. But if your instruction, your doctrine, even your reproof and correction, are from God-breathed Scriptures, although the fallen world, your flesh, and the devil attack, consider what you have gained: forgiveness, salvation, God's favor, and eternal life.

St. Paul suffered. He provides lists of what he endured. And while you can learn from his suffering, while his faithfulness in tribulation provides a model for your faith, his sufferings avail you nothing. But the sufferings of his Lord, the Lord Jesus, His sufferings avail you much. Indeed they avail you everything. St. Paul writes that the Lord delivered him out of his sufferings. But the Lord Himself wasn't delivered. He endured suffering that surpasses human ability. No one delivered Him. He was scourged and crucified. He died and was buried.

It is by that death that He delivers St. Paul and St. Timothy. It is by that death that He delivers you, for that death atoned for all your sins, even your sins of conforming to the fallen world. And the proof of your deliverance, the proof that His Promise is sure, is His miraculous resurrection.

In Him is life that cannot be taken away. And that precious death, that miraculous life, is the center and substance of the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

And in a Divine Mystery, St. Paul was given to author 13 Books of that Scripture. By the work of the Holy Spirit his Words impart more than human wisdom and comfort. His Christ-centered Words are God-breathed, profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, the very thing for which he wrote St. Timothy, the very Words that bring that instruction, the very Words that bring that righteousness to you here, now, today, as you hear by the faith the Divine Word.

The Ark of the True Church will endure the attacks of the world. In Her you are safe. Here you are safe. In Her you are protected, nourished, strengthened and sustained as Christ's Blood is poured into you, that you, O man of God, may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Having brought comfort to St. Timothy in his suffering, St. Paul doesn't stop there. He continues "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the Word! For it is by that Word, the Word of Christ, the Truth of the Incarnate Word, the Word that makes godly men complete, that the Church will be made full. And then, soon, you will see your Lord face to face.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.