

1 Timothy 3:14-4:5

“Read the Fine Print”

I am sure most of you heard the story in the news recently about a Georgia woman who was awarded \$10,000 because she read the fine print. Squaremouth Company, in a contract for purchasing travel insurance, has seven pages of it! But near the end, there is the offer of a \$10,000 reward for anyone who emails the company after getting that far! So Donelan Andrews did just that. The company does this to teach people the lesson of reading and entire document before it is signed.

Andrews plans to use the money to take her husband to Scotland and celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary. The company also donated \$5,000 to each of the two schools that she teaches in and \$10,000 to Reading is Fundamental, a charity focused on children’s literacy. So why am I telling you this? Well, one theologian compares the verses that we just heard to the fine print on a medicine bottle. He believes they were Paul’s last-minute instructions to Christians, sent to Timothy while Paul awaited execution in Rome. And like the fine print – we know they are there but may well skip over them unless we have a reason to focus our thoughts there.

Today is the perfect day to focus on those verse at Nazareth. The day when we recognize our Sunday School teachers of all ages and thank them for their efforts and dedication to helping us incorporate the word of God into our every-day lives.

Paul writes the letter to ask Timothy to come see him before his imminent death because he looked at him as the son he never had. It is believed that Timothy was timid and shy. Paul, however, had spent two decades journeying through the known world to preach the Gospel and

establish churches with Timothy as his companion. And just as parents can often see the positive attributes in our children before they fully live into them, Paul wants to encourage Timothy to believe that he is worthy of his true calling. He recognized that Timothy had a gift for clarifying things in a serene and final way and wanted to lift him up. The verses we just heard can almost be seen as Paul saying: “I know you are afraid and will feel alone after I am gone. So, in case of emergency, read the fine print.”

You see, the fine print teaches us all the four basic gifts of the God-breathed words of Scripture. The Holy Bible enables us to teach sound doctrine, train ourselves and others in righteousness, learn to respect authority and correct our errors. These are the lessons that we can be grateful that we have learned during our faith formation and can continue to use as we grow in our relationship with God. And these are the lessons that our children and adults who attend Sunday School are learning here at Nazareth, thanks to the commitment of our teachers and leaders in Christian Education.

Paul’s first instruction in the case of emergency is: continue to live and believe what you already know. His words don’t ask us to invent something new – to recreate the wheel, as it were. He tells us to rely on the truths that were first set down over 3500 years ago, using our Scriptures. The Bible was written over a span of 1500 years, by 40 writers.

Unlike other religious writings, the Bible reads as a factual news account of real events, places, people, and dialogue. Some things that we read are probably legends that God had the Holy Spirit include to teach us God’s spiritual truths. Historians and archaeologists have repeatedly confirmed its authenticity. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and using each writers' own writing styles and personalities, God shows us who he is and what it's like to know

him. What a gift to be able to rely on something that has withstood so many tests of time to help us in our daily journeys.

Now, we are blessed as God's children to have been created with a hunger and thirst for knowledge. If I asked you to raise your hand if you can remember the name of ONE school teacher that you had as a child, I bet everyone here could do it. As a matter of fact, let's try it. These are people that made such an impression on us, for good or bad, that we will never forget them.

By the same token, I bet every Christian could do the same if asked to remember one Sunday School teacher. The gifts that our teachers give our children through their lessons will literally impact their entire lives. Even if it takes a while to sort them all out. I read a quote from a 5-year old who said, "Jesus enunciated the Golden Rule, which says to do one to others before they do one to you." Not *exactly* correct, but it's a start in learning sound doctrine!

Paul also reminds Timothy that Scripture teaches us how to live in a way that sets us apart from those who do not know Jesus Christ. In other words, it teaches us how to live in righteousness. After reminding Timothy that he KNOWS what Jesus taught, he also encourages him to share what he knows. His words are a reminder to us all that the Gospel is best understood when it is lived in our actions and not just spoken. We cannot preach righteousness and live in whatever way we see fit. That old adage is true – if we talk the talk, we gotta' be able to walk the walk!

That is why Paul reminds Timothy to share the word whether the time is favorable or unfavorable. Some translations say "whether it is in season or out of season." We must not let difficult circumstances keep us from speaking the truth OR from sharing the Gospel. Salvation by God's grace alone. It is our call as disciples today to help others understand that there is

nothing we can say or not say, nothing we can do or not do, that will earn us a place in Heaven. Our salvation is simply a gift. Freely given out of God's love for each one here.

Paul also wants Timothy to remember that God's word teaches us to respect authority – that is to say the authority of God and of those who aim to share God's word with us. Timothy and Paul preached in a time where many false teachings were constantly in competition with the teachings of Christ. And so do we.

King Solomon warns us against the evils of self-indulgence in his words about vanity in Ecclesiastes. This is based on his own experiences. Today, society's false teachers exclaim, "Have it your way", "You deserve a break today" and "Because you're worth it." We live in a world of overnight shipping, instant grits and speed dating. But the Bible teaches us to be patient when we read: "but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." I could go on and on with the false teachings that we don't even blink at in our world today, but I think you get the point.

Of course, this can be confusing. We want what is best for ourselves and those we love. So how do we know what may lead us astray in the world of mass media and instant communication? Paul says that we can recognize false teachings because they tell stories that deviate from the truth. They promote personal comfort versus the hard challenge of the truth that shapes the way we pursue new life in Christ.

This is not to say that God wants us to live in ways that are UNCOMFORTABLE but that we ARE called to recognize when the standards of living that tempt us deviate from the Biblical truths. Thankfully, when we *continue* to learn what we *have learned* and know *from whom* we have learned it, we can understand the need for respecting the authority of God and of

God's word. And we can trust our sources! This teaching of Paul's actually played itself out right here at Nazareth this week.

Wednesday night I was very nervous about the difficult passage that we studied, and it was reflected in my teaching. In my nervousness, I completely lost the ability to articulate what I meant. But as I stammered on and on, the Lord sent Vickie Gray. Vickie said, "I know what you are saying, but I think that THIS is what people are **hearing**." And with that, the lesson got redeemed. It began to turn around. And it was because you all have known Vickie Gray for years. You trust Vickie Gray, as you should. And you know that she teaches sound doctrine that reveals the authority of true teachings!

And finally, Paul reminds us that the word, the teachings of Christ, can correct us in our errors. That is why so often we hear Jesus say, "You have heard it said . . . But I tell you." Jesus came not to contradict the Law or abolish it but to fulfill it and make it more applicable to our lives. As those who are saved by grace and filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit, we are not bound by the Law but are redeemed by Christ's blood on the cross because God knew we could never keep the whole Law all the time, left to our own devices.

The Spirit helps us interpret God's word, sends us teachers who have the gift of making the word apply to our lives and gives us the ability to love one another. And since Jesus taught that people would know that we are his by the way we love one another, the word, properly taught, can correct us when we are not sharing agape love.

Now all of this sounds so simple. It is sound doctrine. It speaks of God's righteousness and our need to show that in our lives. It reminds us to respect the authority of Scripture and be sure we are not learning from false prophets. And it can help us see the error of our ways and

put on the new life in Christ that we are destined to have. So why am I spending so much time going over this when we could all just leave and go to lunch?

Because while these words sound good in church, when we get out into the world, they are like fine print. We forget to read them. We think they are not necessary – we know what the warnings say. We've read them before. Which is EXACTLY why Paul offers them one more time before he passes his ministry on to his intern.

I think what Paul is reminding Timothy and all of us is this. God created us OUT of love FOR love so that we could CONTINUE to love. And then he left us a roadmap for doing just that. The word. But often, we try to complicate things but adding our own twists and thoughts and interpretations when the truth is right in front of us.

I read the story of a man who owned an icehouse who lost his watch. He was dismayed because it had been passed from his grandfather to his father and then to him. He went out and told the workers that if anyone could find it before their shift was over, they would receive a \$100 reward.

His employees began to sift through the trash, to comb through the sawdust on the floor until they had splinters in their hands, to walk the property in elaborate grids, looking for the watch. But no one found it and they all went home disappointed.

A few minutes later, the young errand boy came into the office with the watch. Overjoyed, the icehouse owner asked him how he had found it. The boy replied, "After everyone left and it got really quiet, I laid down on the floor and listened until I heard it ticking!"

It was as simple as that. So, let's all read the fine print – the truth of God's amazing love for us all. We've been given the gift of Scripture and those to help us use it every day. It's all right here in front of us. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God of the Word and the Living Word, thank you for the people that you have put in our lives that help us understand your great love for us. We are especially thankful today for this church, for the intentionality her people have in helping us become better disciples and for the teachers and leaders you have called for this purpose. Knowing that Jesus sits at your right hand and intercedes for us each time we pray, we offer the joys and concerns of our hearts and our world.

Thank you that you have created us with a plan and a purpose for our lives. Empower us by your Spirit to listen for your call in our lives and give us the courage to follow. In this way, we know you can equip us for service in the body of Christ in this church, in this community and even in the world.

Use our eyes to see the injustice of the world and our mouths to speak the truth in love. Remind us to praise those who are living and serving in ways that teach others to love. Show us ways to encourage that build up the work of your kingdom on earth and tactfulness when we must show others a better way. Make us forgiving towards ourselves and others, as you, in Christ have forgiven us.

Send your comforting presence on those who are grieving the loss of a loved one, an ability or a relationship. Give courage to those facing changes, those who are in the time of decision making and those facing upcoming medical challenges. Bring hope to those who struggle every day with addiction, poverty, oppression, mental illness and aging. And send your spirit of peace into our world to guide our leaders and those in power.

We thank you for the brave men and women who serve our nation in the military and for those whose lives are dedicated to the protection and service of others.

Lord your word forms a strong foundation on which to build our lives. Like a sower, you have planted your truth of love in our very souls. Thank you for those who continue to nurture what has been planted within us. Find us faithful that we may take what we have learned and grow to know you. We pray in the name of the Word made flesh, our savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.