

# Hang in There: Be Tenacious with Biblical Truths!

*Kenneth LaPrade, KOG Missions Conference 2024*

Embracing genuine biblical truth in our modern world is certainly not the task of uncommitted cowards! We certainly live in times when unclear ideas are adamantly propounded as valid among those who go with the flow of hazy 21st century theologies and philosophies. For example, misled, religious folks might quite easily jump on the popular bandwagon of an easy-going, *got-it-made* mindset, by extracting a few Bible verses out of context and promoting a “positive thinking” model. Careful, loving rebuttal can often be of vast, life-saving rescue to such misinformed people.

In the first paragraph, I mentioned the concept of “extracting a few Bible verses out of context.” Maybe I can clarify this widespread dilemma by expounding a brief bit about what it means to study the Scriptures **in context**. There is a **historical context** of Scriptures involving the setting of events from over two thousand years ago. Nowadays, one can look up who were Sadducees, Pharisees, the Herod family, and Romans in Palestine - in Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias - or classic books like *New Testament History* by F.F. Bruce. How did ancient Jews go within a couple of centuries from being under Seleucid (Greek) rule - to a condition of relative independence - to eventual subjugation? On top of that, a **cultural context** indicates how people lived and thought, good studies about Bible manners and customs can be very helpful. Also, **literary context** compares biblical writing to other literature from the ancient world, as well as noting the types of figurative language that abound so frequently in Scriptures; see E.W. Bullinger’s *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*.

Along these lines, a prime factor is this: the **true context** Scripture is **not** church history from the second century CE onward, but rather it *is* the specific context of first century writers (when it comes to truly viewing New Testament concepts.) Church history may surely provide us with interesting developments that fuel modern, Western, religious debates, but it would be extremely anachronistic to read such history *back into* the mentality of first century writers of the New Testament (or to the Old Testament writers who preceded them.) Sadly, one can be a very good 21st century reader - while failing to grasp the detailed context of Scriptures!

With these **contextual realities** carefully taken into account, we can overview the importance of **enduring** throughout life’s events and decisions, according to a consistent Scriptural emphasis. Early on, when Jesus began to herald about a response of a **change** of focus and life direction (or *repentance*) to believe the Gospel of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15), he began from the get-go to discuss the urgent need to *persevere* in the message with a proactive, strenuous effort. In Jesus’ vocabulary, “faith” or “belief” (*pistis* in Greek) did not merely mean holding a casual, mental agreement regarding certain ideas or facts. Genuine *faith* biblically connotes **faithfulness**, **allegiance**, and **devotion**, coupled with **obedient** thinking, words, and actions (Romans 1:5, 16:26). Such is the **authentic context!**

Jesus’ primary parable, as *required* to understand all his parables (i.e. the sower - Mk. 4:13) about responding to the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mt. 13:19) demonstrates that the only successful type of listener to the Kingdom-Gospel (category #4) is one who listens with “a good and honest heart”, grasping the vital

message with conscientious **perseverance**, while continually producing fruit. Such bona fide listeners don't (1) allow the message to get stolen from their minds (by Satan) before really believing it, or (2) only receive it quickly with joy - but very temporarily (due to persecution), or (3) allow pressures and pleasures to choke the Gospel so that no fruit is produced (Lk. 8:11-15).

This abounding **context** of ongoing commitment is also reflected in many of Jesus' heartfelt encouragements and stark warnings (Luke 14:25-27):

"A large crowd was traveling with Jesus. So, turning to them he said, "Those who come to me and don't "hate" [hyperbolically meaning to have *less* devotion toward] their own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even their own lives, cannot be my disciples! Anyone who doesn't **persevere** "carrying his own cross" [a symbol for carrying out an unselfish responsibility] cannot be my disciple!"

Jesus follows up this stark exhortation by challenging his audience to carefully "count the cost" (v. 28-32), like a man preparing to build a tower (which might be expensive!), or a king with 10,000 men preparing to face a dangerous enemy, an army of 20,000! "In the same way [said Jesus in v. 33], "None of you can be my disciples if you do not give up everything!"

In a quite similar fashion, Jesus rebukes. in a predictive, future scenario, those who would be sincerely saying, "lord, lord" very confidently, due to having evidenced spiritual gifts (i.e. prophesying in his name, casting out demons, etc.). Jesus sternly rejects such folks from even entering the Kingdom - because of disobedience **to his words** (Mt. 7:21-27).

In light of this challenging *context* throughout the four gospels, evident in many vivid ways, it would be absurd to try to convert Jesus into a modern icon of easy-go-lucky, pop culture spirituality! Jesus **never** even implied, "You are now free to relax and 'rest on your laurels.' Because of a moment's sincerity of believing in me (Jesus), you have permanently arrived on 'Easy Street.'" After all, being set on a "cruise control" mode, or being already "saved by grace" surely implies sheer **effortlessness** - while one can smugly disregard his/her own actions, (referred to as "works.")

Even superficially, it is quite obvious that this brash example (in the paragraph above), symptomatic of the *context* of many current religious mindsets is in **severe contrast** with the *context* of Jesus' urgent commands, like Mt. 7:13-20, about carefully avoiding the deceit of false prophets and the bad fruit coming from bad trees. Luke 13:24 says, "Keep making **strenuous efforts** to get in through the narrow door", (so as to eventually enter the Kingdom of God - the wider context of Lk.13:24-30.) Unfortunately, some early Protestant norms might be tied to the confusing formulae cited nowadays about "grace", "faith", and "works". Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, vocabulary debates in later church history do **not at all** reflect the 1st century CE **context** of word usage in new covenant writings!

The stern tone of the overall Gospel calling (which we have seen so far) to strict standards of faithful obedience and **enduring** allegiance to Jesus' words - is certainly **not** meant to discourage us or dissuade us (as if we were dealing with demands which are impossibly difficult). After all, Jesus himself comforted his dedicated followers (Mt. 11:28-30) by stating, "Come to me, all you who are getting weary and burdened, for I will give you rest. Take up my yoke and place it on yourselves, and learn from me, for I am

gentle and humble in heart. You will find rest and refreshment for yourselves. Truly, my yoke is easy to bear, and my burden is light.”

In Psalm 103, merciful blessings are poured out lavishly toward those who revere Yahweh, (v. 18) who **keep** his covenant and remember to **do** his commandments: “As a father shows compassion to his children (v. 13-14), so Yahweh [the LORD] shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.” Our awesome Creator intimately knows our human frailties; even so, He gets deeply involved in rescuing our lives! Further details of God’s lovingkindness permeate the Psalms.

In addition to the bold, compassionate encouragements mentioned above, one can see in the flow of Scriptures that God keenly **desires** that all humans be **saved** and arrive at the **full knowledge of the truth** (1st Tim. 2:4). Also, (2nd Pe. 3:9) God is not slow in bringing about his ultimate Kingdom promises, but He is extremely patient for our sakes, while deeply **wanting** everyone to repent (or turn to Him with a changed mindset). God’s judgements will even be truly **fair** to those who **never** were really exposed to knowing the genuine Gospel message, (according to Romans 2:12-16.)

Along with such dynamic incentives to “**hang in there**” and **not give up** - are the very practical promises of **forgiveness** described in 1st John 1:5-2:2. Effectively, even if a true believer gets sidetracked to the degree of “walking in darkness”, he/she can heed wake-up calls - and be restored completely to the “light”, by honestly confessing his/her errors to God (instead of staying in denial). Thus, one is strongly assured of being forgiven for **all** sins - and totally cleansed of **all** wrong-doing. The substitutionary, atoning merits of Jesus’ loving, voluntary death are pervasive enough to absolutely deal with all the sins of humanity throughout the whole world! How extensive is the overall, redemptive love of the Father God who sent Jesus?

Also, we can constantly keep in mind the sound perspective that strong directives which seem like “tough love” - meted out for a time by our often-faulty earthly parents - were endured by us on many occasions. So why not put up with the wisely offered discipline from our perfect heavenly Father? He **always** has our best interests at heart, so that we can grow up and share in his holiness. (See Hebrews 12:4-11.) We certainly **dare not** water down God’s exacting requirements, as announced so precisely by Jesus, by exchanging his loving commands for the positive-sounding, pious platitudes of badly irresponsible, man-made religion!

After briefly perusing the emphasis in the four gospels on concerted, devoted **perseverance** toward Jesus’ pioneering Gospel of the Kingdom of God (Heb. 2:1-3), we can view how many other passages throughout the new covenant writings corroborate what we have seen so far about the theme of ongoing **endurance**. The requirement to persevere in what’s right is a constant **condition** attached to promises of true, biblical **hope**.

At times a brief passage (Col. 1:21-23) reminds us of the biblical theme of the need to persist in faithfulness. Sometimes, a longer passage (2nd Peter 1:1-12) reiterates this theme of active endurance. Even whole books, like the book of Hebrews, might weave in this perseverance theme as an integral part of understanding its broad message.

For example, in Colossians 1:21 it is seen that we had previously been enemies of God through evil behavior. “But now [v.22-23] he has reconciled you in the body of his [Messiah’s] flesh through his death,

in order to bring you into his presence holy, blameless, and irreproachable. This is **conditioned**, of course, upon you, **keeping firmly** in the faith, being **solidly grounded** and established, and **not shifting away from the hope** of the **Gospel you heard**. This Gospel was proclaimed [or announced] in all creation under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.”

2nd Peter, chapter 1:1-12, provides a dynamic checklist, so to speak, of desirable attributes with which to supplement our faithfulness with diligence (while straining every fiber of our being). This is in the context of how God grants us everything necessary for life and godliness, of being called to God’s own glory and excellence, and of His precious and exceedingly great promises - so that we share the divine nature, having escaped the world’s corruption due to excessive desires.

So, in terms of the list of virtuous qualities, we are exhorted to earnestly strive to add to our faith - moral excellence [like God’s own “virtue”], to moral excellence - knowledge, to knowledge - self-control, to self-control - perseverance [or patience], to perseverance - godliness, to godliness - brotherly affection, to brotherly affection - love.

I would say that building such attributes in life would correspond to developing a rich, faithful life of prayer - according to Scriptural norms. I would also say that if one is honest with this “checklist”, it helps to correct natural, erroneous tendencies. For example, if one gradually drifts into becoming unforgiving, doubtful, sloppy, edgy, arrogant, neglectful, apathetic, impatient, uncaring, unfriendly, etc., one can then perceive such personal “red flags” and diligently get back on board with this list of godly qualities!

“For [v.8] if you have these qualities in plentiful supply and grow [increase] in them, they will assure that you do not become wasteful or fruitless in terms of the full, practical knowledge of Jesus, the Messiah.” One who lacks these qualities is warned of becoming doubly blind and terribly forgetful! “Therefore [v. 10-11], my dear family members, be full of effort [or be diligent] to **confirm** that God has called you and chosen you. If you practice these things [from the list of godly qualities] you will never trip up, and in this way the entrance into the Kingdom of God’s Coming Age, the Kingdom of our lord and savior, Jesus, the Messiah, will be richly provided for you. So, I intend to continue reminding you of these things [v.12], even though you know them and have been firmly established in the truth you now have.”

A passage in 1st John 2:28-3:3 also reminds us that while we await his coming, there is supreme value in staying active (persisting) in **doing** what is **right!** “Now, little children, [2:28-29] abide [remain] in him, so that when he is revealed we have boldness and not shrink from him in shame at his royal arrival. If you know that he is righteous, you also know that everyone who **does** what is right [or practices covenant faithfulness] has been fathered by Him.” Our born-again status of really being “children of God” is linked to practicing faithfully what is **right!** “All [3:3] who have this hope in him [the returning Jesus] make themselves pure, just as he is pure.”

In closing, when it comes to careful study of the book of Hebrews, there is a dynamic interplay between the inspiring encouragement [2:17-18 and 4:12-16] and stark warnings. For example, believers are sternly advised to be careful not to fall into the same types of costly unbelief and disobedience which overcame the Israelites with Moses: Hebrews 3:12 -4:11. Believers are furthermore exhorted not to fall away (6:4-12), becoming useless, nor to turn their backs on the value of Jesus’ blood sacrifice by habits of deliberate sin, thus shrinking back (10:19-39) from living by faithfulness!

Within this context (the book of Hebrews), which is parallel in many ways to the balance of beautiful words of comfort and strong admonitions in the four gospels, I will briefly highlight a few short passages which really illustrate the broad theme of the ever present need to **endure** and **persevere** in light of the blessed **hope**: Jesus' return to raise the dead and usher in God's Kingdom on earth. Such loving encouragement is totally congruent with Jesus' basic parable of the sower and the four soils. Once again, it is those who receive the Kingdom-Gospel with good and honest hearts, while **persisting in faithfulness** (continuing to produce fruit) who are rewarded.

“But the Messiah is faithful as a son over God's house [Hebrews 3:6]. And we are his house, if we **hold tightly** to the boldness and confidence of the hope **firmly to the end.**” “We have become [3:14] sharers of the life of the Messiah if we **keep a firm, tight grip** on our original assurance right through **to the end.**” “We encourage each one of you [6:11-12] to show the same **diligent** energy for bringing your hope, your goal, fulfilled to the end, so that you will not become lazy and sluggish, but rather imitate those who through faithfulness and **perseverance** inherit the promises.” “Therefore [12:1-4], since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses [in reference to the examples of faithfulness listed in chapter 11], let us lay aside each weight, and the sin which gets in the way so easily. We must run with **perseverance** the race that lies before us, focusing our eyes on Jesus. He is the one who initiated and brought to completion our faith. For the joy which was awaiting him, he **endured** the cross, disregarding [or taking lightly] its shame, and has now taken his seat at the right hand of God's throne. Consider what he put up with, the severely enormous degree of opposition from sinners, so you don't grow weary and give up. In your struggles against sin, you have not yet **resisted** to the point of shedding your blood.”

We have merely scratched the surface here of what it means to continue in loving, fruitful ways of **endurance**, but we have perused enough of some key contextual indicators to see that **faithful perseverance** is not only encouraged as a major tenet throughout Scriptures, but it is required - if our **faith** is to be authentic! We have also briefly overviewed the truth that there are fabulous, merciful incentives pointing to an ultimate goal and hope attached to this pervasive theme of **not giving up**.

\* Here is just a fairly brief note (as of page 3) regarding the modern dilemma about the biblical usage of “grace”, “faith”, and “works”, of which there are, sadly, some current areas of badly misleading confusion.

The phrase “works of the law” is repeated eight times in the Bible, and it clearly indicates a standard of legal rules - involving required circumcision, old covenant calendar observances [like strict Sabbath-keeping], Levitical food laws, and other details which would have been formerly enforced to distinguish Jews from non-Jews. Galatians, Hebrews, and many **new covenant** passages make it clear that these particular “works” are now **abolished** (Eph. 2:14-16) and are no longer required of anyone.

Nevertheless, sometimes, the word “works” by itself, is most likely a type of shorthand for the phrase “works of the law”, such as in Romans 4:2,6; 9:11,32 and 11:6. Perhaps, when Eph. 2:8 speaks of us being “saved by grace - and not by works”, it might very well be a reference to the now abolished “works of the law”, (due to the ensuing “law” context in 2:14-16.) But another contextual possibility is that the 2:8 statement has reference to the fact that **previous** “works” when one was formerly “dead in sins” (2:1-5) do not save us. By the way, Titus 3:5 also mentions not being saved by previous “works”. Whether Eph. 2:8

refers to “works of the law” or previous, useless, works (or actions), the context (v.10) then speaks of **now** being created in Christ Jesus for **good works**, which God prepared ahead of time so that we would **walk in them**. To infer that such **prepared good works** are merely **optional** (or not really required) - truly contradicts the thematic flow of all new covenant Scriptures - as seen in part in this paper.

Along with the thesis of this study (involving **required perseverance** until **the end**), one might want to read and reread the *following* passages in which “works” obviously refer to **vital, obedient actions** (**NOT** outdated old covenant “works of the law” or defective, previous actions - [noting the brief exception of the Titus 3:5 phrase already mentioned above]): **Matthew 24:42-25:46** (noticing Jesus’ panoramic view of judging both believers and unbelievers, clearly by their **actions**), **James 2:14-26** (James should never be disparaged as an “epistle of straw” or an inferior piece of revelation!), **Titus 2:7-3:8** and **3:14** (while observing that “good works” should be sought enthusiastically!)

Obviously, upon considering the passages recommended above “good works” - as obedient, faithful actions that correspond to genuine “faith” - are to be heartily embraced! They are **never, ever** to be downplayed through a deceptive, man-made “faith vs. works” doctrine! We are **not** to frivolously disparage the vital importance of obedient actions as if they are the **mere**, disposable “works” which have nothing to do with our salvation!

An example to carefully consider for those who might still be stuck in a “once saved, always saved” paradigm (in which all “works” or actions are carelessly deemed irrelevant) is in **Luke 12:35-48**. The believing household servant in the parable who keeps doing what his master requires (such as faithfully feeding others) will be commended and rewarded. On the other hand, **if that same servant**, “Says in his heart, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming back,’ and begins to beat the slaves [male and female] to eat and drink and get drunk” ... he will be judged as an unbeliever! **Notice**: it is the **exact same servant** (while obviously still making free will choices) who can consistently continue to **do good, honest, helpful things** and end up being commended! Or he, (that same servant), can get distracted by wrong thinking and **begin to selfishly mistreat others - and get into personal excess**, and end up being judged negatively as an unbeliever!