

Unit Theme: Timothy, Titus, Philemon

June 16, 2024 (Lesson 3)

CHRISTIAN CALLING AND VOCATION

- 1. Pray for Secular and Church Leaders** (1 Timothy 2:1-7)
- 2. Guard Your Calling and Vocation** (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:5-6)
- 3. Fight to Be Faithful** (1 Timothy 6:11-16; 2 Timothy 1:13-14)

Central Truth: Christian leaders need continual prayer to remain faithful in their calling.

Focus: See value in God-given vocations and be faithful in service.

Evangelism Emphasis: Prayer for leaders aids the Church's evangelistic work.

Golden Text: "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Timothy 4:14).

Calling and *vocation* are terms most often associated with individuals who engage in public ministry as a career. We talk about being "called to preach," or we say "pastoring is their vocation." The two terms are often used interchangeably and defined as "a strong urge toward a particular way of life or career."

Timothy's having a definite call of God on his life is evident by the mentoring instructions written to him by the Apostle Paul, but we are not to assume supernaturally inspired Christian service is reserved only for vocational ministers. To the contrary, all believers are to consider themselves "the called according to [God's] purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Some, however, are called to specific leadership roles (see Eph. 4:11), and perhaps a greater level of responsibility and accountability is expected of them (Luke 12:48).

In this study, we will continue to observe Timothy as one called to pastoral leadership. As a father exhorts his son, Paul emphasizes to Timothy the necessary prioritization of prayer and godly living. Our emphasis in this study begins with prayer and ends with an appeal to hold fast to sound doctrine—a combination essential for Biblical balance in every generation.

The church must never allow prayer to become a formality. Our prayers must always be varied and versatile. Paul offers four important components of an effective prayer life and ministry: *supplications* (passionate entreaties), *prayers* (requests for personal needs), *intercessions* (petitions on behalf of others), and *giving of thanks*. No person and no need should be excluded from our prayers, and we should pray “for all people” (1 Tim. 2:1 NIV).

1. PRAY FOR SECULAR AND CHURCH LEADERS

A. People in Authority (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; 2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; 4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

Paul insists prayer is the church’s priority. “First of all” is the phrase he uses to begin this pastoral charge. Thus, before any other instructions are given, and before any other ministry is undertaken, Timothy is to call the church to prayer. These directives constitute the kinds of things the church would be expected to intercede about, not only in their public gatherings, but also in their personal and family prayer times.

God’s church is not a political entity, and its leaders must never permit partisan politics to either guide or to become the church’s mission. Although in some cultures the government has taken an adversarial attitude toward organized religion, the church must be careful how it engages any such conflict. Paul’s command is to pray for “everyone” (v. 1 CSB). When he narrows that to “kings, and for all that are in authority” (v. 2), he leaves us without the option to pray only for those leaders whom we like or with whom we agree.

At the time of Paul's writing this, Nero was the emperor of Rome. History says Nero murdered his brother, his wife, and his mother because he saw them as a threat to his throne. He killed Christians with fire, turning them into human torches, and often crucified them upside-down. Tradition reports Paul was assassinated by Nero, the possibility of which Paul must surely have been constantly aware. Nevertheless, his pastoral instruction to Timothy was to pray for "kings and all who are in [positions of] high authority" (v. 2 Amp.).

Some might argue Paul's prayers were in vain because Nero and many other authorities did not change. Yet, to take that position is to miss the point of why Paul instructed such prayers. He gave three reasons why Christians are to pray for their government officials.

1. *For our own benefit.* Offering such prayers motivates us to quiet reflection and peaceable living (v. 2). Whatever anybody else does, we can take it to the Lord in prayer where we find the peace required to live in godliness and honesty. All of us should exercise our legal rights to get involved in the affairs of the community, the state, and the nation. However, becoming people of prayer enables us to temper our reactions to partisan divisions, and always maintain a godly demeanor.

2. *It is good and acceptable to God.* As believers, we are dual citizens—of this world and the world to come. Our foremost desire is to live a life pleasing to God, being good ambassadors of Jesus Christ in a world that, in many ways, is like a foreign land. Many parents, when asked by their child why certain directives were given, have responded with, "Because I said so!" Why do we pray for kings and those in authority? Because God said so! It is "good and acceptable" to Him (v. 3).

3. *He wants "all men to . . . come unto the knowledge of the truth"* (v. 4). "Our prayers can go where we cannot . . . there are no borders, no prison walls, no doors that are closed to us when

we pray” (Brother Andrew, *And God Changed His Mind*). Who knows what tragedies are averted, what wars are postponed, what atrocities are canceled because a believer prays? And, who knows what hearts in the king’s palace, or the Congress, or the White House, are moved by the “effectual fervent” petitions of a godly believer (James 5:16)?

The Work Before the Work

Long ago a Chinese man became prized and celebrated for making the best, most elaborate and enduring bell stands for temples. He attributed his success to “doing the work before the work”—searching through hundreds of trees to find the ideal tree for his woodcarving (taken from *Inside Job*, by Stephen W. Smith).

In today’s study, Paul said very little to Timothy about the day-to-day rigors of pastoral life. There was nothing about sermon preparation, visitation, or administration. Instead, he focused on the “work before the work” (prayer), without which young Timothy would have become overwhelmed and discouraged.

B. Christ the Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5-7)

5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; 6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. 7 Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.

Verse 5 echoes the voice of Jesus thundering, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6 NKJV). A “mediator” is a go-between; one who settles disputes. The greatest of all disputes regards the separation of man from God because of sin. Sin breaks our fellowship and communion with God. Paul explains Jesus is the only valid way for us to connect with God.

As early as the third century AD, some in the church began to venerate certain sainted men and women, including the Virgin Mary. In the beginning this was seen as a polite way of honoring those before them, but over time the practice of praying to the saints was introduced. John Calvin wrote, “The church in the beginning tolerated these abuses, as a temporary evil, but was afterwards unable to remove them; and they became so strong, particularly during the prevailing ignorance of the Middle Ages, that the church ended up legalizing, through her decrees, that at which she did nothing but wink at first” (*Treatise on Relics*, 1543). Calvin rightly concluded such prayers were rooted in Roman pagan superstition, and constituted idolatry.

The Bible contains no examples in either the Old or New Testament where believers prayed to Mary or to departed saints. None. To the contrary, Jesus told us to “ask the Father in my [Jesus’] name” (John 16:23). We are instructed to pray to “our Father . . . in heaven” (Matt. 6:9); to “call upon the name of the Lord” (Rom. 10:13); and to “let [our] requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6). From a simple point of practicality, why then, if we are privileged to pray directly to the Father through Jesus Christ who ever lives to “make intercession” for us (Heb. 7:25), would we need to channel such a prayer through a third party? We do not, and such actions constitute idolatry rather than genuine prayer. We agree, at least on this point, with the Augsburg Confession’s statement: “Scripture does not teach calling on the saints or pleading for help from them. For it sets before us Christ alone as mediator, atoning sacrifice, high priest, and intercessor.”

Jesus alone has purchased the right of mediation on our behalf. Nowhere in Scripture are certain select individuals elevated to sainthood; all sanctified believers are “called to be saints” (Rom. 1:7; Eph. 2:19). It was only Jesus who “gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:6), and only through Him do we have access to God.

§ Explain Paul's double emphasis on truth-telling in verse 7.

2. GUARD YOUR CALLING AND VOCATION

A. Use Your Gift (1 Timothy 4:14)

14 Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

The call of God is a sacred trust with weighty responsibilities. God is sovereign, and He will not change His mind or hold one guiltless who squanders His call. As Paul said, "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29). "Without repentance" (*ametamelēta*) means "irrevocable." Thus, Paul insisted that Timothy "neglect not the gift" God had given him.

This exchange is reminiscent of Jesus' parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30), in which a landowner gave varying amounts of money (talents) to his three servants. At the end of the designated time, each gave an account to the landowner as to how he had invested and used what was given to him. No two servants had been given the same amount of funds, nor were any of them responsible for the proper use of any talents except their own. At the designated time, each answered for how he had used his individual talents. Two of the three servants had used their talents wisely with varying degrees of success, but the third had done the opposite of what Paul urged Timothy; he had "neglected the gift" and suffered the consequences.

At some point, Timothy's call had been confirmed by a prophetic word and by the laying on of the hands of the eldership of the church (1 Tim. 4:14). In modern terminology, he had been called by God and "set forth" by the local church. There was no turning back from this call, and it must not be neglected. Perhaps one reason for Paul's insistence here is that he was one of those who had laid hands on Timothy at his ordination (2 Tim. 1:6), and he had a personal investment in Timothy's life and ministry. This reminds us of the importance of spiritual fathers and mothers

who will become personally invested in and tenaciously care for their spiritual sons and daughters. Those who engage in lifelong Christian service soon discover “though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers” (1 Cor. 4:15 NKJV).

§ *Why does God give spiritual gifts to believers?*

B. Continue in Sincere Faith (2 Timothy 1:5-6)

5 When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. 6 Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.

Those who would adequately fulfill the call of God must serve Him with “sincere and unqualified faith” (v. 5 Amp.). This involves filling our minds with the truths of God’s Word. Unlike Eastern meditation where a person empties their mind and seeks to ponder nothingness, we must fill our mind with and constantly contemplate divine truth. Before the Apostle Paul became his mentor, Timothy lived under the godly influence of his grandmother and mother, who taught him from the Old Testament (3:15). Timothy had not inherited their genuine faith, for that is not possible, but their example and teaching gave him “the wisdom that leads to salvation” (v. 15 Amp.).

Although Paul knew Timothy’s faith was real, he knew also, like everyone, Timothy had weaknesses. Therefore, Paul moved on from his words of affirmation to words of challenge and encouragement. He reminded Timothy to “stir up the gift of God” (2 Tim. 1:6). It is possible the gift referred to here is a particular gift of the Spirit. If so, the gift is unnamed. It is also possible the word *gift* here is the Holy Spirit himself. Peter, preaching on the Day of Pentecost, promised his hearers, “You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38 NKJV). We read in the

Book of Acts that the gift of the Holy Spirit was often received through the laying on of hands (8:17; 9:17; 19:6).

Whether the gift was the baptism in the Holy Spirit or one of the gifts of the Spirit, Paul perceived Timothy's gift had been neglected. The gift must be stirred up, reclaimed, and allowed to function. The Greek word translated "stir up" means literally "to fan the flame" or "rekindle the fire." God had given the gift, but it was Timothy's responsibility to ensure the gift's continual operation. God's gifts are stirred up through prayer, worship, and the study of His Word.

Making a Mark

If Christ lives in us, controlling our personalities, we will leave glorious marks on the lives we touch. Not because of our lovely character, but because of His.—Eugenia Price

3. FIGHT TO BE FAITHFUL

A. Pursue Spirituality in Christ (1 Timothy 6:11-16)

11 But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. 12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. 13 I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; 14 That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: 15 Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; 16 Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.

We are justified, regenerated, sanctified, and made righteous in the sight of God by grace through faith (2 Cor. 5:21) and not by any works of righteousness we have done (Titus 3:5-7). We can never be any more righteous in the sight of God than we are at that moment when all sin has been forgiven, and the blood of Jesus Christ has done its cleansing work (2 Cor. 5:17). There is no contradiction to this, however, when Paul instructs Timothy to pursue “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness” (1 Tim. 6:11) and “fight the good fight of faith” (v. 12).

Righteousness is defined as “acting in accordance with divine or moral law.” Righteousness is “the quality of being right in the eyes of God, including character (nature), conscience (attitude), conduct (action), and command (word). Righteousness is, therefore, based on God’s standard because He is the ultimate Lawgiver” (Phillip Wijia, “What Is Righteousness?”, *Christianity.com*). Though righteousness is often presented as the absence of unrighteousness (the things righteous people don’t do), it is categorized with the positive spiritual virtues of faith, love, patience, and gentleness.

All Christians, like Timothy, are placed under a solemn obligation in the “sight of God” (v. 13), as well as in the sight of human witnesses (v. 12), to keep intact the priceless treasure of the Gospel. A “confession” (v. 13) always tells the truth. Though it costs us trials and hardships, we should pay the price to make the truth known. Our stewardship includes the stewardship of God’s Word.

In verse 14, Paul bound this charge on Timothy as strongly as he could. We should be just as indelibly impressed with the solemn charge today. Our stewardship will have to be accounted for when the Lord comes again. The titles of our Master—“the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (v. 15)—should impress us beyond all argumentation of the One to

whom we must give an account when He comes. And since we know not when He is going to appear, this should hold us true to His principles and His work. As supreme Sovereign over the universe, He has the power to reward or to punish His servants.

In verse 16, Paul declares only God is eternal, so He is the only source of immortality. If we have hope of life after death, this hope has to be concentrated in Him. His purity, His holiness, and His wisdom are so great that we cannot approach God on our own—only through Christ as mediator. “To Him be honor and eternal dominion!” (NASB).

Life After Life

The very spirit of man, something within each of us, affirms there must be *life beyond this life*. Even with this innate knowledge, this grain of truth placed within the consciousness of man, many yet have not found the real truth. They are ignorant of God’s plan of redemption and salvation. They know nothing of the Christian hope.—Ray H. Hughes

B. Hold Fast to Sound Doctrine (2 Timothy 1:13-14)

13 Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. 14 That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.

How do we measure ministerial success? Is a pastor successful if he builds a large congregation? Or if she develops a popular online ministry? Is success measured by noses and nickels? The size of the building? To the contrary, the New Testament puts primary emphasis on faithfulness to sound doctrine. “This is an important measure for any pastor; he must hold fast the pattern of sound words. The primary measure should not be humor or excitement or personality or charisma or even evangelistic interest. Some who claim an evangelistic heart let

go of the pattern of sound words and show themselves to be unfaithful to their Lord and their calling” (*Enduring Word Commentary, 2 Timothy*).

The word “form” (v. 13) is critical to this discussion. The Greek, *hypotyposin*, may also be translated *standard*: “Hold fast the standard of sound words.” Clearly, Bible doctrine dogmatically refuses to adjust itself to the whimsical, changing minds of men. The latest revelation from one who purports to be a prophet, or the innovative interpretation from our favorite minister does not alter the standard of sound doctrine. We are never left at the mercies of those who say, “This is what I get out of that verse!” Timothy was to “hold fast to the standard.” He was to grab hold, hang on, and refuse to let go of the sound doctrine he had heard from his mentor, the Apostle Paul (v. 13).

In verse 14, Paul refers to the standard of that Word as “that good thing which was committed to you” (NKJV). Timothy could hold fast to sound words by the same power that inspired their writing (3:16-17)—the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 14). The Holy Spirit will never inspire any believer to espouse a message that in any manner contradicts to the revealed Word of God. Our pattern for faith and practice is the whole Bible (Old and New Testaments) rightly divided. The inspired Word alone is our standard. We never go to the prophet to confirm the Word; we always go to the Word to confirm the prophet. Then we “hold fast [to the standard] of sound words” (v. 13).

§ *How do Jesus Christ (v. 13) and the Holy Spirit help believers hold to sound doctrine?*

SPIRITUAL MENTORING

Paul was a seasoned mentor to his spiritual son Timothy. One of the first duties of a mentor is to help the mentee develop realistic expectations. The elder assists the younger in setting

goals, understanding standards of operation, and measuring progress. Paul, as a good mentor, never “talked down” to Timothy. Rather, Paul encouraged, challenged, and motivated him. Paul was never ambiguous, but as an experienced leader, he clearly articulated his expectations.

Spiritual leaders today are called to raise up sons and daughters in the faith. As Paul with Timothy, we must come alongside them and guide them in developing a life of prayer, guarding their faith, and fighting to be faithful in both godliness and sound doctrine. From the beginning, God’s pattern has not changed.

“Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life,” Moses charged the people of Israel: “And teach them to your children and your grandchildren” (Deut. 4:9 NKJV).

Daily Devotions

- M. Recognize and Commission Leaders (Numbers 27:12-23)
- T. See Leaders From God’s Perspective (1 Samuel 16:4-13)
- W. Yield to God’s Direction (Jonah 1:1-10)
- T. Christ’s Call Turns the Tables (Mark 2:13-22)
- F. Priorities for Christian Leaders (Luke 9:57—10:3)
- S. Provide for Church Leaders (1 Corinthians 9:1-10)