

Unit Theme: Timothy, Titus, Philemon

July 7, 2024 (Lesson 6)

EXEMPLIFY FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN SERVICE

- 1. Be an Example to Fellow Believers** (1 Timothy 4:9-13)
- 2. Suffering, Dialogue, and Teaching** (2 Timothy 2:11-15)
- 3. Commit to Disciple Fellow Believers** (Philemon 8-16)

Central Truth: Christian servants teach by both word and deed.

Focus: Realize the importance of being an example and model Christian service in community.

Evangelism Emphasis: Evangelism leads to discipleship of new believers.

Golden Text: “Therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe” (1 Timothy 4:10).

Much has been written about projecting a proper image of the church and its ministry in the community. Church-health specialists tell us adequate signage, well-manicured lawns, clean and fresh facilities, well-dressed and likable greeters, and a welcoming environment are all essential to projecting a healthy church. Important as each of these may be, in our study today, Paul talks about the projection of an even more important public image—the exemplary lifestyle of those in charge! For the church to be of any benefit to an unbelieving world, those who hold positions of leadership must lead transformed lives that demonstrate Biblical holiness.

1. BE AN EXAMPLE TO FELLOW BELIEVERS

A. Command and Teach (1 Timothy 4:9-11)

9 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. 10 For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe. 11 These things command and teach.

Paul had just instructed Timothy regarding the profitableness of living a holy life, reminding him godliness is our foundation for daily living and for our eternal hope (v. 8). “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:12 NKJV) must accept that resisting the ways of a sinful

world is extremely challenging, and those who choose to do so will be ridiculed and reproached by unbelievers (1 Tim. 4:10). As author Jerry Bridges wrote, “To live a holy life is to live a life in conformity to the moral precepts of the Bible and in contrast to the sinful ways of the world” (*The Pursuit of Holiness*). Nevertheless, sanctified believers pursue a life of separation from sin, with a desire for holiness “because we have fixed our [confident] hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe [in Him]” (v. 10 Amp.).

Ministers are to preach and teach with a sense of divine authority (v. 11). Having studied the Word and having heard from God through the Word and by the Holy Spirit, the teacher is to deliver the message with persuasion. He or she must not enter the sanctuary or classroom with speculation, theory, opinion, or with a few ideas borrowed or copied and passed from someone else. If the teacher seems hesitant, unsettled in thought, or appears to not be well-versed in the subject being taught, the result may be the delivery of an “uncertain sound” that leads to confusion or misunderstanding (1 Cor. 14:8). Uncertain instruction produces uncertain disciples!

The current trend seems to be for the preacher to only say things that make people feel better when they come to church. Some have wrongly suggested preachers and teachers avoid using words like *sin* and *hell* and other Biblical terms. The suggestion is the message should not confront sin or sinful lifestyles, but should be attractive, palatable, and entertaining.

Certainly, no genuinely anointed person will deliberately set out to anger anyone or to offend, but the Word of God will offend individuals who are disobedient and unwilling to repent. The call to repent and live godly must be delivered with authority and compassion. To be compassionate without authoritative teaching leads to compromise and encourages sin. However, to be authoritative without compassion leads to domination and legalism. A great example for

balance was set by Paul as he recalled his ministry to the Ephesians: “I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:31).

Deep Preaching

You cannot preach conviction of sin unless you have suffered it. You cannot preach repentance unless you have practiced it. You cannot preach faith unless you have exercised it. True preaching is artesian; it wells up from the great depths of the soul. If Christ has not made a well within us, there will be no outflow from us.—Charles Spurgeon

B. Be an Exemplary Christian (1 Timothy 4:12-13)

12 Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. 13 Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

One of the greatest temptations for young adults is to be presumptuous and act without proper guidance, resulting in criticism. One of the greatest temptations for older people is to forget they also were once young and presumptuous and were criticized for it. Paul likely recalled his tutelage, including his times of correction under his own mentor—the prominent Jewish leader Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Desiring to become a Christian version of Gamaliel for his younger friend, Paul was perhaps sixty years old while Timothy was likely less than half his age. The apostle instructed his spiritual son to live in such a way as to minimize the opportunities for people to second-guess him because of his inexperience—“Let not one look down on your youthfulness” (1 Tim. 4:12a NASB).

Verse 12 continues to say godly teachers must be an example by what they say (“word”), the company they keep (“conversation”), their relationships (“charity”), their attitude (“spirit”), their beliefs and practices (“faith”), and their holiness of heart and life (“purity”). Paul remembered

what it was like to be young and vulnerable. In fact, his youthful naiveté might have drawn him into the radical Jewish movement which, prior to his conversion, persecuted the early church (Acts 8:3; Gal. 1:13). Paul called for spiritual focus and cautious living so young Timothy would be the best possible example of what it means to be a Christian.

It is disappointing when well-intentioned individuals use less-than-ideal criteria for selecting pastors and teachers. Often the idea is that if someone is popular, has a charismatic personality, dresses well, is entertaining, or has the appropriate education, that person is a good candidate for leadership. While any of these, or any combination of these, may be laudable, the greater qualifications exude from a minister's spiritual life. As urged in 1 Timothy 4:13, pastors must "focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers, and teaching them" (NLT).

§ *Why is it important for a congregation to have both young and older leaders?*

2. SUFFERING, DIALOGUE, AND TEACHING

A. A Faithful Saying (2 Timothy 2:11-13)

11 It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: 12 If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: 13 If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

"This is a faithful saying" (v. 11a NKJV) is a statement Paul used nine times in his letters to Timothy and Titus. This favorite expression, much like certain familiar phrases used by speakers today, helped to drive home a critical point. Paul's statement was like a modern preacher who prefaces an important statement by saying, "Listen carefully," or "Don't miss this." Paul was about to share urgent directives about how teachers are expected to exemplify Biblical ideals—

instructions that young Timothy dare not overlook. Here, Paul used this phrase to introduce a series of four important contrasting statements.

1. “If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him” (v. 11b). Paul’s entire discourse to Timothy is about the necessity of living a godly life. This statement harkens back to the apostle’s declaration, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20); and his challenge to the Romans, “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (6:11).

2. “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (2 Tim. 2:12a) is a reminder that, despite all our best efforts, holiness of heart and life will be offensive to worldly and ungodly people. Yet, we press on undeterred because we “reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

3. “If we deny him, he also will deny us” (2 Tim. 2:12b). Pastors are employed by Jesus Christ and not merely by the congregation they serve. They must “endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (v. 3), always standing with Christ and the Scriptures. Hebrews 13:17 says the preacher/teacher will give an account to God for the proper care and feeding of those under them.

4. “If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful” (2 Tim. 2:13). “Believe not” means to become unfaithful. If an unbeliever becomes unfaithful to God, that will not negate God’s faithfulness. The minister’s faithfulness is God’s expectation because followers are often led astray when leaders become unfaithful. We must continually remind ourselves that our faithful God is able to keep us from falling (Jude 24).

Others Are Watching

Late in his career, when the New York Yankees were comfortably ahead in the pennant race, Joe DiMaggio was asked why he continued to play so hard. He said, “Because there might be somebody out there who’s never seen me play.”

The Christian should live every day as if someone will see him who has never seen a Christian before.—David Halberstam, *Summer of ‘49*

B. The Word of Truth (2 Timothy 2:14-15)

14 Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. 15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Paul used the word *charge* at least nine times in his writings. Here he said to charge the church not to waste time arguing over nonessentials that distract from the Gospel. To *charge* is to issue a command or to “sound a warning.” He said, “Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen” (v. 14 NIV).

Preaching and teaching that is not Bible-centered is unprofitable and distracts from the church’s mission. It is a serious matter to wrangle over personal opinions, political persuasions, or other debatable matters to the neglect of the Word of God. Paul said such practices result in “the subverting of the hearers” (v. 14). The *New Living Translation* says, “Such arguments are useless, and they can ruin those who hear them.” Such teaching will eat through the body of Christ like a cancer (v. 17) and “destroy the faith of some” (v. 18 NIV).

Paul charged Timothy to “study” (v. 15), but in this context, the word connotes more than the idea of academics. The word translated “study” (*spoudason*) is translated elsewhere as “do thy diligence” (2 Tim. 4:9, 21) and “be diligent” (Titus 3:12). When it comes to preaching and

teaching, ministers must pour themselves into their preparation so they will be unashamed because their message is pleasing to God.

Being *diligent* involves more than coming before the congregation or the classroom with a good testimony or a few good thoughts to share. Rather, this diligence demands thorough preparation enabling the teacher to accurately teach the inspired Word of God. “Rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15) means “properly handling” or “properly distributing” the Scripture. The leader has no license to teach only certain favorite passages or focus on personally preferred themes. Our thoughts and views might be inspirational, but only God’s Word is divinely inspired. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (3:16-17).

§ *How should we pray for those who teach and preach God’s Word to us?*

3. COMMIT TO DISCIPLE FELLOW BELIEVERS

A. Bold Appeal (Philemon 8-11)

8 Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, 9 Yet for love’s sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. 10 I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: 11 Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me.

In Paul’s letter to Philemon, we have another example of an elder seeking to mentor and disciple a younger person. In Rome, Paul had ministered to the runaway slave named Onesimus, leading him to Christ (v. 10). Onesimus had likely stolen from Philemon and ran away to Rome.

Now Paul was sending him back to Philemon. The way Paul approached Philemon demonstrates how a Christian servant is to teach and disciple in both word and example.

First, Paul placed himself on the same social status as Onesimus. A believer is “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think” (Rom. 12:3); so, as he wrote to Philemon regarding his slave, the apostle twice identified himself as “Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ” (vv. 1, 9), because for four years he had been in the protective custody of the Roman government. Second, Paul offered to pay what Onesimus owed to Philemon, just as Jesus, in His death on the cross, had purchased the sin debt of them both . . . indeed, of us all (see 1 John 2:2). Now, because of his newfound faith in Christ, Onesimus had also become a bondservant to Jesus. Since he had been justified by faith in Christ and thus freed from his debt of sin, Paul appealed for his justification in the sight of Philemon and forgiveness of that debt as well. So confident was Paul in this man’s conversion that he agreed to pay anything Philemon was unable or unwilling to write off (v. 18). What a powerful Christian example of forgiveness and grace!

An adage says, “You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.” Paul understood it is often better to appeal to a person’s heartstrings than to make demands of them, even though you may have some rights or delegated authority to do so. Paul alluded to an apostolic privilege by which he might boldly enjoin that Philemon comply with his wishes; he chose rather to “beseech” him, or appeal to him, “for love’s sake” (v. 9). Paul risked the possibility that Philemon would reject his appeal, in which case Paul had verbally obligated himself to pay the debt himself. Reconciliation is always risky, and it isn’t always possible, but in most cases, a kind appeal for an amicable solution should be offered. How many situations in the church that ended in division and misunderstanding because of a demanding spirit might have been averted if Christian love had been exercised?

§ *How was Onesimus now living up to his name, which means “useful” (v. 11 NIV)?*

B. Beloved Brother (Philemon 12-16)

12 Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels: 13 Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel: 14 But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly. 15 For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; 16 Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

There are several beneficial layers to Paul’s appeal to Philemon, including how he was a mentor to younger Christians. Paul not only identified himself as the “prisoner of Jesus Christ,” but as “Paul the aged,” or “Paul, an old man” (v. 9 NASB). Furthermore, just as he did regarding Timothy, he classified Onesimus as “my son” (v. 10). Paul also had a father/son spiritual relationship with Philemon, asking him to receive Onesimus (“my son”) “as a brother beloved” (v. 16).

As a mentor, Paul demonstrated the ability to see in others what they themselves (and oftentimes other people) did not see. It is much like the sculptor looking at what others suppose is but a block of wood or stone, yet the sculptor envisions a masterpiece. A mentor sees and believes in the potential of others and seeks for ways to bring that forward and nurture it. Paul saw leadership qualities in Onesimus that he himself likely didn’t recognize. These qualities were so evident to Paul that, had it not been for the servant’s debt to his master, he preferred keeping him in Rome as a ministry partner rather than sending him back to Philemon (v. 13).

Paul demonstrated how Christian believers live in community and consider the feelings of others as well as their own. Perhaps Paul initially thought Philemon would allow Onesimus to stay with Paul and work off his debt, like community service, by serving Paul (“on your behalf he might minister to me” (v. 13 NASB). He could have made an emotional appeal, saying, “But, Philemon, I am confined, and I need him.” He could have just kept Onesimus in Rome and said, “Sorry, Philemon, that’s the way it is!” Rather, Paul insisted he would do nothing without Philemon’s agreement; and if Onesimus was to be forgiven and restored, he wanted it to be because Philemon willed to do so and not out of compulsion (v. 14).

Presenting Onesimus to Philemon as a brother and not as a runaway slave underscored the importance of Christian leaders being committed to the ministry of reconciliation, especially among those who have been reconciled to God. The situation with Onesimus had been disappointing, troublesome, and distressful for Philemon. Onesimus had escaped owing a debt; consequently his work had been left undone or for others to do. Philemon had lost an asset and Onesimus had become a criminal. Yet Paul saw a divine “perhaps” in it all (v. 15). Perhaps Philemon the master had lost a slave, but Philemon the Christian was gaining a brother.

Jesus spoke of this kind of reconciliation. When we are wronged, we are never justified to seek revenge or to isolate or ostracize our offender. Jesus said, “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother” (Matt. 18:15 NKJV). Yes, Jesus went on to outline a Biblical procedure to follow if reconciliation is not achieved; but just as Paul became a mediator between Philemon and Onesimus, we must sincerely attempt restoration of relationships before taking any other action. When we read Paul’s proposal for Onesimus to be received “no longer as a slave, but as a

dearly loved brother” (Philem. 16 CSB), we can hear again the voice of Jesus saying, “If he hears you, you have gained your brother!”

Healed Wounds

Our scars are a witness to the world. They are part of our story. Healed wounds are symbols that God has restored us.—Louie Giglio

CHRIST’S AMBASSADORS

Christian believers and especially leaders are called to demonstrate the character of Christ. Love for others is the hallmark of a Christlike life (John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7-11). As our loving Savior, Jesus demonstrated submission (Luke 22:42; John 4:34), acceptance (8:10-11), compassion (Matt. 9:36), and forgiveness (Luke 5:20). Because we have been reconciled to God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, He has committed unto His church “the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18).

As Paul concluded his remarks on reconciliation to the Corinthian church, he declared, “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ” (v. 20). This means as Christian servants, we must model Christ’s attributes to the congregation and to the community.

Daily Devotions

- M. Will You Commit to Discipleship? (1 Kings 19:11-21)
- T. Will You Remain Faithful? (2 Kings 2:1-9)
- W. Will You Choose to Disciple Others? (2 Kings 2:10-18)
- T. Will You Follow Me? (Mark 8:27-36)
- F. Do You Understand My Example? (Matthew 26:26-35)
- S. Will You Follow My Direction? (John 21:15-23)