

The Power of Example

Text:

II Timothy 3:1-4:5 (ESV)

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. 2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

6 For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, 7 always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. 8 Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. 9 But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.

10 You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, 11 my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra--which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. 12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 4:2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 4:3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4:4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. 4:5 As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Introduction:

Paul's aim in the passage we have just read is to warn Timothy about the false teachers he must contend with, on the one hand, and to encourage and instruct him as to how he should proceed on the other. Three times in the passage he first speaks of the false teachers and then addresses Timothy with an emphatic "but you":

- In verse ten after a long description of these deceitful leaders which closes with the words "But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men", He turns to Timothy with his first "but you". Here he reminds Timothy of his relationship to him and the example he had set for him and how his doctrine, manner of life, and character stand in stark contrast to those who are causing the trouble.
- In verse 13 he reminds Timothy that "evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived". This is followed by the second emphatic "but you". To avoid this deceit Timothy must remain faithful to what he has been taught to the Scriptures which he has been taught from a child, and which alone are able to make us "wise unto salvation" and equip us for a life of service to God.
- Finally, he warns Timothy that his faithful ministry of the Word of God will not always be positively received because, he says: "the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they

will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths”(4:3-4). Immediately after these words we find the final “but you”. In contrast to these teachers with itching ears, Timothy must “always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, and fulfill his ministry.”

In the present study I want us to focus on the first admonition to follow Paul’s example. Paul says the way to stay on track to not be overwhelmed or to succumb to your adversaries is to remember and practice all that you learned from me. As we think about this let us first consider how Paul taught Timothy and then what he taught him.”

I. Paul’s Method

Paul taught by example. I read the text from the ESV because it properly repeats the “my” before each of the nine things that he reminds Timothy that he had learned from him. The word that is translated “fully known” in the KJV and “followed” in the ESV describes the action of a disciple of one who learns by example from one who is skilled at what he is doing.

This was the method of Jesus. Jesus founded no school and called no one to sit in his classroom. When he called individuals the call was invariably “follow me”. It was also Paul’s method. He did not hesitate to encourage people to follow his example. In I Corinthians 4:16 he says to the Corinthian believers: “wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.” The reason he can say this becomes clear in the same book in 11:1 he says: “Follow me as I follow Christ.” We are always at the same time disciple and teacher. We can only ask others to follow us because we are following Christ. In Philippians 4:9 he says: “Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do.” What we should notice here is that Paul has taught them both with his words and with his life. He does not just tell them to act upon what they have heard from him but also what they have seen. As we will see momentarily it is not just doctrine that Timothy has learned from Paul, but also his manner of life. Finally In II Timothy 3:7-9 Paul

could correct the bad behavior of some of the believers there by pointing to his own good behavior. Much in the same way a parent might say do a child “did you ever see me do such a thing?” Paul says: “For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.”

Not only was this the method of Jesus and the method of Paul, it was also to be Timothy's method. In I Timothy 4:12-13 Paul had admonished him: “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching”. Notice again that Timothy is to teach with words; he is to expound the Scriptures, but first he is to be an example. Just as he had followed Paul's doctrine and manner of life he is now to teach and set the example for others.

Finally let me say that this was not just the method of Jesus and Paul and Timothy, it is to be our method. Someone might say: “but aren't these instructions for leaders?” Yes they are, but before you excuse yourself from action by saying: “I'm not a leader”, let me remind you that almost all of us are leaders in some capacity. If you are a husband you are a leader. If you are a parent you are a leader. If you are a teacher you are a leader. Almost every Christian is an example to someone. He may be a bad example, but he is an example, and the primary way we communicate truth to others is by the power of example. Our words, what we say, become powerful when they are first demonstrated in our lives, in what we do.

II. Paul's Message

This leads us to our second consideration. We have looked at how Paul taught, now let's look at what he taught. He lists nine specific things that Timothy had learned from him that he was to continue to act upon himself and to

communicate to others. He says: “But you have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra.”

We may briefly divide the nine into three groups of three. First he speaks of his doctrine or teachings, then of his manner of life, then of his aim in life. These three are closely related. They are what make us what we are. All of us have a doctrine. It may be true and it may be false, but we have one. We may not call it that and we might be hard pressed to put it into words, but we have one. Our doctrine is what we believe to be ultimately true. Our doctrine demonstrates itself in the way we live and in our life goals and purposes. For example, if we like Paul and Timothy, believe that ultimate truth is in Jesus then we are going to live as he taught us to live and our purpose in life like Paul’s purpose will be to know him and to make him known. If, however, we believe like many that ultimate reality is what I acquire and achieve in this life then I will conduct myself in an entirely different fashion and my goal in life will be about acquiring and achieving what is important to me rather than seeking “the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”

The second triad, faith, patience and love, are very closely related to what the New Testament often speaks of as the three basic virtues of the Christian life, faith hope and love, since patience is hope in action. As Paul says in Romans 8:25: “ But if we hope for that we see not, *then* do we with patience wait for *it*.” These are the three basic virtues that are to characterize all Christian action. Faith in Jesus Christ produce hope and that hope leads us to act patiently in love, not because love is always immediately rewarded, but because it is the way of Christ. Sometimes, as we see in this text, our faith hope and love lead to persecution and suffering. That is one of the great mysteries of the Christian life. The Christian seeks only to do the good and right and loving thing, but is still hated and persecuted and maligned by the world. This should not overly concern us since Jesus warned us that it would happen. The world is still under the power of the evil one and does not “love the light.” Nevertheless, we are called to always, in all

that we do, act out of our faith in Jesus Christ which leads us to patiently do his will and his will is that we, like he, act in love.

I need to add here that the best way for us to learn how to do this is to see someone else do it. It is not the easy thing to do that we might imagine. It is not hard to love those who return our love, but Jesus said to “love your enemies and pray for those who spitefully use you.” It is when we see this kind of divine love modeled in the lives of others that we learn what it is, so that when life lays difficult situations upon us we have examples to work from.

The final three things that Paul reminds Timothy of are “steadfastness, persecutions, and sufferings”. Paul is at the end of his life, and his resume of persecutions and sufferings would have filled more than a page of this letter if he had listed them all. He doesn’t, but he specifically lists the three cities in which he started churches during his first missionary journey, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, and Lystra. We don’t have time to review all that happened at those three places, but I remind you that Timothy was from Lystra, and he was a part of that original church. He joined Paul and travelled with him from the beginning of his second missionary journey. Remember what happened at Lystra. Jews from Iconium who were still upset with Paul from what he had taught there followed him to Lystra where they stoned him and left him for dead. When they had gone however, Paul got up and went into the city unharmed. The important thing that Paul wants Timothy to understand about his sufferings and persecutions and why he was steadfast in all of them is: “The Lord delivered me out of them all.” It is possible that Timothy was present outside the city of Lystra the day Paul rose up and walked unharmed back into the city. If he wasn’t present, he at least soon came to know what had happened. What a firsthand lesson in suffering and persecution. If we are going to truly follow Christ we will have some things to give up some hard decisions to make. Even if we are not actively persecuted, we will suffer for our association with, and our faith in, Jesus Christ. Like Timothy we need the Psalmist’s assurance that “even though we walk through the valley of death” we are not alone. The Lord is with us and he will deliver us out of them all.