

"Words For Pastor and People" (Part 11)

This is the last in this series of sermons from 1 Timothy. Hopefully we've seen that some of the problems that cropped up in the early church are issues the church faces today. And I hope we've become wiser in how to address them.

In the closing words of this letter Paul writes: "But as for you, man of God, shun all this..." (1 Timothy 6:11). "Man of God" - that's one of the great titles in the Old Testament. Moses, for instance, is called a "man of God". It's a title given to prophets and messengers of God. When the challenge is laid before Timothy, he's reminded not of his weaknesses and inadequacies, but of the *honor* that is his: he's a *man of God!* I hope that you and I can be so devoted to Christ that people can rightfully call us a "man of God", a "woman of God"!

Paul tells Timothy, "Shun all this." Shun all what? This goes back to the previous section that we looked at last week. Shun stupid controversies and disputes. Shun unsound doctrine. Shun trying to use your religion as a means of material gain. Shun the love of money.

Instead, Paul tells Timothy what to pursue (and this is good advice to us): pursue righteousness – a right relationship with God, and right living that reflects that. Pursue godliness – living with a sense that all our life is lived in the presence of God. Pursue faith – always trusting the Lord. Pursue love – unselfishly caring for others. Pursue endurance – patiently enduring the hard times in life. Pursue gentleness – a gentle, understanding way of relating to others. Not bad pursuits, huh!

The next verse says, "Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses (1 Timothy 6:12). "Fight the good fight of the faith." That advice was given to Timothy earlier, in chapter 1. Being a follower Jesus means you're in a war - against the world and its values and evils, the flesh (our own sinful human nature), and the devil.

"Take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." Timothy is encouraged to hold tight to that promise of eternal life in Christ. Live each day with eternity in mind.

"In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords" (verses 13-15). "Keep the commandment." "Commandment" here probably means "the Christian way of life". Be blameless in that regard until the return of Jesus Christ in glory! Jesus will return, "at the right time", and be proclaimed to all creation as King of kings and Lord of lords!

Verse 16 says this: "It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen." Paul breaks into a doxology, as he thinks of the glory of God! One interesting phrase in this verse:

"It is he alone who has immortality." God alone is inherently immortal! Greek philosophers taught the "immortality of the soul". That small, divine spark in every one of us that is immortal. That is not Hebrew thinking. Not Biblical truth. The brutal truth is: *we are mortal*. We die. The end. But.....God, through Christ, raises the dead, and clothes us with immortality. Our Christian hope is not the immortality of the soul, but *the resurrection of the dead* – offered to us as a gift, through faith in Christ.

Let's move on down to verses 20-21, as Paul ends this letter. "Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the profane chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge; by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith." I think what Paul is saying to Timothy in the closing section, and throughout the whole letter, is this: Hold firm in your devotion to Christ. *Be the best that you can be for God!* We need that today, don't we! People not ashamed to stand tall as men and women of God. People who will give their best to the Master, and be all they can be for Christ!

Are you willing to be all that you can be for Christ, our Savior and Lord? A lot of people today are content with mediocrity in our commitment to Christ and the church. We're a Christian – sort of. We think of God when we're at the church, but the rest of the week, well? We're willing to follow the Lord as long as it doesn't demand too much, or interfere a lot with the things we have planned. But the world is never changed for Christ by mildly committed Christians and lukewarm churches - or by those who water down the Christian message to placate unconverted people. Rather it's those people who go all out for Christ, and who make Jesus and His will the passion of their life, who bring the light of Christ to a dark world.

There are places in the world today where people are following Jesus at great cost. A man named Welton Gaddy a few years ago went to Romania to preach the gospel. When he got there, he was overwhelmed with what he saw. There were people outside the church where he spoke, lining the walkways and standing on the grounds. It was almost impossible to get into the building because of the crowd, which had began coming in mid-afternoon for that Sunday evening's service. Believers in Romania could meet only when the government approved their assembly. Confessing to be a Christian made their lives harder. Welton said, "Many of them had undergone the harassment of a lengthy interrogation by civil authorities because of their religious faith. Some of them had been severely deprived economically as a result of their persistent witness."

As he prepared to preach to the people many thoughts raced through his mind. "I wanted to simply greet these folks in Christ's name, and to encourage the believers in their pilgrimage." Just seconds before he was to preach, his young interpreter whispered, "Don't be easy on them. Preach the gospel." "Don't be easy on them," he thought! These folks had taken a risk just to *be* there! They experienced hardships every day. But the interpreter had said, "don't be easy on them. Preach the gospel." Welton, reflecting later on those words wrote: "These people could not give up. They could speak of hope and influence only out of lives with no status. They still could dream. They still could live with integrity."

I receive a publication put out every month or two by The Voice of the Martyrs. It relates stories of Christians in the world, boldly and courageously suffering for their faith. (*Summarize stories from the most recent issue*).

Keep this in mind when we hear some of our excuses today. "I can't come to Sunday School because it would mean 2 hours of my Sunday instead of one...". "I've got too much going on in my life to come to Bible study at night." "I think I'll stay home from church today because it's *raining*...and I'm kind of *tired*." "I really don't want to speak to the unsaved people I know about Jesus because they may laugh at me, or not like me anymore". On a sunny morning Jeff's mother came into her son's room and said, "Jeff, it's Sunday. Time to get up! Time to get ready for church!" From under the covers came mumbles: "I don't want to go." "What do you mean, she said. "Now get up and get dressed for church." "No!" he shot back. "I'll give you two reasons why I don't want to go. I don't like those church people and they don't like me." "Nonsense," she said. "I'll give *you* two reasons you need to go. First, you're 42 years old, and second, you're the pastor!"

I talked with a husband and wife, active members of a church I once served, who told me they had stopped attending adult Sunday School classes. They dropped their kids off, then went out to a restaurant for coffee because, they said, it's the only time in the week they had to talk! Now I know people are busy - but is that the *only* time they could clear for meaningful conversation? Couldn't they have dropped something else? In one church, a couple Nancy and I were close to, confided to us that they didn't come to Sunday School because it was "their time" in the week to make love! One of them would drop the kids off at Sunday School, then go back home! Then they'd come to the worship service, which followed Sunday School. (I used to kid Nancy and say, "So that's why they walk into church with that silly grin on their faces, looking so happy and contented).

Paul is telling Timothy, "Be the *best* that you can be for your God! Keep your priorities straight! Don't let lesser things crowd out your firm commitment to Jesus Christ and His work!" I admire those people who may have a lot of irons in the fire, busy moms, those with demanding work schedules, who still *take the time* to worship regularly...be involved in the church...do things in the neighborhood or community to help others and serve others. I served three country churches, a 3-point charge. At one point we had a 7 year-old, a 3 year-old and a new baby. I had to travel to three different churches to conduct services on Sunday mornings. I left early for the first service, yet Nancy got herself and the kids together in time for Sunday School and church. Hats off to those of you who make that extra effort!

The Church desperately needs men of God, women of God, who will give of their best to the Master and His Church! Chuck Colson, in his book on the church, *The Body*, tells of being driven back to the airport after a speaking engagement by a young man named Brian, pastor of a small Baptist church in Southern California. As they were cruising along the freeway, Chuck asked the young pastor a standard question, ""How are things going in your church?" Brian hesitated for a moment, then said, "We've kind of been through it." He paused, then went on. "In fact, we've cut our membership a bit" (glancing at Chuck quickly as if expecting him to be

disappointed). "To be precise, we've cut our congregation in half." "What happened?" Chuck asked. "Well, we had 220 members, but nothing was happening. I mean the place was dead, and no matter what I preached, nothing changed. So one day the deacons and I prayed. We said, 'Lord, bring only Your people here. We want those who are ready to repent and really give themselves wholly to You. Only bring those folks here.' He said they even stood at the door of the church silently praying this as people filed in."

Chuck writes that Brian glanced at him several times to see if his sanity would be questioned - I mean, who would pray for people to stay away from church? But Brian went on. "An amazing thing happened. God answered the prayer. People began dropping out, one by one. We went from 220 to about 100. Then the place began to change. We almost went broke, but people got serious with God, they got involved, and now membership is creeping back up." Then he grinned and added, "I think we may be going to have a revival!"

William Barclay, in his comments on this Scripture, says, "The very fact Timothy was addressed as "man of God" would make him square his shoulders and throw his head back as *one who has received his commission* from the King!" If you've given your life to Christ, you've received a commission, a calling, to be the best disciple of Jesus you can be! I believe deep in the heart of most people is a desire to make our life count for something beyond just our selfish pursuits...to make the world a better place. What better cause is there than to represent the Lord Jesus Christ, and to be people through whom Christ works to bring love and healing to a world that needs it so badly.

During my teen years, Fred Pierce Corson was bishop of the old Philadelphia Conference of the Methodist Church. Each year, at the service where clergy were ordained to the ministry. the bishop would issue an invitation for young people to give their lives to Christ, and to answer the call to serve Christ wherever He would lead. Those services each year played a great part in helping me dedicate my life fully to Jesus, determined to be all I could be for my Lord. At each ordination service, Bishop Corson would give out a cross to those who responded to the invitation to follow Christ. It came to be called the "bishop's cross". Today, we have a small wooden cross that you may take if you are willing to give your life over to Christ and be all you can be for Him.

Also, as the bishop gave the invitation, that huge gathering of people would sing the familiar invitation song, "Just As I Am". But the words were different. The words were about *young people*, giving all they have to God. You know, there's a *young person* inside of us, no matter how old we are, a young person who wants to break through the cynicism and loss of vision and hope that so often characterizes the middle-age or senior years. There is that *young person* inside us who would dream and dare again!

We're going to sing that song we sang at the ordination services. Let that kid inside of you break free, and sense again (or for the very first time) the thrill of abandoning yourself to Jesus Christ, and believing He can do some special things through you! Here are the words of this great hymn:

"Just as I am, thine own to be,
Friend of the young, who lovest me,
To consecrate myself to thee,
O Jesus Christ, I come.

"In the glad morning of my day,
My life to givd, my vows to pay,
With no reserve and no delay,
With all my heart, I come.

"I would live ever in the light,
I would work ever for the right,
I would serve thee with all my might,
Therefore, to thee I come.

"Just as I am, young, strong and free,
To be the best that I can
For truth and righteousness and thee,
Lord of my life, I come."

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