

Be An Example

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God, our Father, has a goal for all his children: to grow in the family likeness; to become like their Father. The apostle Paul put it this way: “Be imitators of God as dear children” (Eph. 5:1 -- all biblical quotations will be from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted). This goal can be realized as we look to Jesus and become like him. John said, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the father, He has declared Him” (Jn. 1:18). The Greek word for “declared” is from *exegeomai* and means, “to lead or bring out, hence, to make known” (Zodhiates, 913). We know what God is like by observing what Jesus was like and what he said about God in the gospel records. Therefore, God wants us to “be conformed into the image of his son” (Rom. 8:29) in order that we may become like our Father.

Becoming Like Jesus

In I Peter 2:21, the apostle said that Christ left “us an example, that you should follow his steps.” “Example” is the translation of *upogrammos* and means, “a writing-copy, hence, a pattern” (Bullinger, 265) to be imitated. When I was a boy our school had the letters of the alphabet, capitals and lower case, above the blackboard in our rooms. They were there, no doubt, so that any child who forgot how to write one of the letters could look above the blackboard and copy the letter onto his paper. To be sure, the letter he wrote was imperfect and the letter from which he copied was perfect, but at least his letter resembled the one above the blackboard. That is exactly what “example” means. Christ, our “writing-copy” and “pattern”, is perfect and we are imperfect, but we are to grow into Christ’s likeness.

By so doing we are growing into God-likeness; we are taking upon ourselves the family likeness and are becoming imitators of God. As we follow the example of Christ, we in turn can be examples to others. Thus, Paul said, “Be an example” (I Tim. 4:12).

Making It Practical

While on his first missionary journey Paul came to the city of Lystra in Asia Minor where he, no doubt, first met and baptized a young man named Timothy. On the apostle’s second journey he again visited Lystra and, because Timothy was of good reputation among the brethren, Paul asked the young man to join him in his travels (Acts. 16:1-3). We believe Paul had baptized Timothy on the first journey because he later referred to Timothy as “a true son in the faith,” “a beloved son,” and “my beloved and faithful son in the Lord” (I Tim. 1:2; II Tim. 1:2; I Cor. 4:17). To the Philippians Paul said Timothy had served with him “as a son with his father” (Phil. 2:22). There is evidence that Timothy traveled with Paul on the apostle’s second and third missionary journeys, was with him during the first Roman imprisonment, was with him following the ordeal in Rome, and was himself imprisoned (Heb. 13:23). After Paul’s release from prison, the apostle left Timothy at Ephesus to teach the church and to protect it against false doctrine while he traveled to Macedonia (I Tim. 1:3). He later wrote his first letter to Timothy, his trusted friend, urging the young man to “be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (I Tim. 4:12). The Greek word *upogrammos*, translated “example” in reference to Christ’s example for us (I Per. 2:21), means “a writing pattern.” Another Greek word, *tupos* is used in I Timothy 4:12 and means “a mark made by striking,...a mold to shape something else” (Mounce, 259). The idea is this: Timothy is to be a “mold that should be pressed into the lives of others so that they can attain the same

shape” (Mounce, 259). The mold Timothy was to demonstrate in his life was the result of his following the pattern of Christ. “Be an example” is the imperative and what follows in I Timothy 4:12 is the practical application.

1. **In word.** Timothy was to be an example in the language he used and the manner in which he used it. The words spoken reveal one’s heart (Matt. 12:34), his character, who he really is. Thus, Paul said, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Eph. 4:29). Words of bitterness, wrath, anger, quarreling, and malice should never be in the vocabulary of the Christian (Eph. 4:31). Additionally, Timothy, as a preacher, was to “preach the Word” (II Tim. 4:2); speak “the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15); “hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard” (II Tim. 1:13); and “not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition” (II Tim. 2:24)
2. **In conduct.** Timothy was to be an example in the way he lived before others. He was to live by the standard of the word of God which he preached and, therefore, to conduct himself properly as a member of the family of God, the church (I Tim. 3:15). So Timothy was to “practice what he preached.”
3. **In love.** This was the great motivator for speaking and acting properly. Timothy was to be an example to others in the love one should have for God and for other people. Love for God always manifests itself in obedience. It seems to this writer that these two things summarize the very purpose for which man was made—to love and to obey God. When God made man in the beginning he made man as a person, a term that comes from the Latin word *persona* which came to mean “an individual, a feeling,

thinking and acting being...with the capability of free thought and actions” (Walker, 2337). Sociologists have recognized that human behavior involves the fact that man has emotions (power to feel), intellect (the power to think), and will (the power to act). With the intellect man can think about God as he studies God’s Word, (who he is what he has done, what he is doing, and what he yet will do). As man thinks about the God of Scripture, he should learn to exercise his emotions and love him who first loved us (I Jn. 4:19). When man learns to love God he should exercise his will power and decide to obey God. When God made Adam in the beginning he placed him in Eden and “commanded the man” to refrain from eating of one tree (Gen, 2:16,17). This was not simply an arbitrary commandment, but an opportunity to fulfill the purpose of which he was made: to love and obey God by exercising his personhood in thinking about, loving, and obeying God. Perhaps this is the reason that Moses, among the last things he said to Israel, admonished his people to love God (Dt. 6:5). This is why Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love God (Mt. 22:37). Jesus also said, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15). John wrote, “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments” (I Jn. 5:3). So Timothy was to be an example in loving God and his love would lead to being an example in loving others. John said, “He who loves God must love his brother also” (I Jn. 4:21).

4. **In spirit.** To be an example “in spirit” refers to one’s character which is invisible but is manifested “in one’s actions” (Bullinger, 728). In II Timothy 1:7, Paul said to Timothy, “God has not given us a spirit (characteristics - JPL) of fear, but of power (to prevail - JPL) and of love (toward people JPL) and of sound mind (discipline - JPL).” Timothy’s character was to be observed by others in his actions. Note: the word for “spirit” is not

included in some Greek manuscripts but treated here because the translators of the KJV felt there was evidence to support it and the NKJV retains it.

5. **In faith.** The Greek word translated “faith” is from *pitis*, the noun for “faith,” and in this context must refer to Timothy’s “fidelity” or “faithfulness” (Mounce, CXXXI). For a similar use of this word see Titus 2:10. Timothy’s fidelity or faithfulness was to be a model for others.
6. **In purity.** Timothy was to be an example in purity, or in self-control. The Greek word, *agneia*, appears only here and in I Timothy 5:2 in what are usually referred to as Paul’s Pastoral Epistles, I and II Timothy and Titus. In 5:2 it is evident Paul used the word in the context of “sexual purity” or “chastity”. Timothy was to keep his fleshly desires under control and to set an example in this for other.

The Importance of the Issue

Paul instructed Timothy to give continuous and careful consideration to how he lived and what he taught. Paul told Timothy that if he would do this he would “save both yourself and those who hear you” (see I Tim. 4:15,16). Here is an important fact: if members of the body of Christ would be careful to set a proper example before others, both in and outside the church, the impact for good would be great and far reaching. Those whose lives are touched by each of us may or may not read the Bible very much, but they will read us because we are letters of recommendation for the cause of Christ and we are “known and read by all men” (II Cor. 3:2.)

“You are writing a gospel, a chapter each day;
By the deeds that you do and the words you say.
Men read what you write, whether faithless or true:
Say, what is the gospel according to you?”

So, let us go forth into life and, as we go, let us heed the admonition of Paul to Timothy and “be an example”.

References

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