

## SERVE FAITHFULLY

It seems that having a good example to follow is a source of strength to a lot of people. I can remember a man in our church named Claude Jones. He would come to church and Sunday School every week though he was barely able to get around because of crippling arthritis. Recalling that kind of faithfulness can help us to overlook the aches and pains we have and to keep on doing what we know we ought to do. We read stories of people who have done well in life in spite of obstacles and problems and these help to inspire us to overcome the difficulties we face when we try to accomplish anything worthwhile.

No matter how well we may be doing, each of us has room for improvement and growth and it is important for us to know what constitutes improvement in our life. In this regard it is helpful to have some standard by which we can use to measure how we are doing with our life investment.

The second letter of Paul to Timothy was written at a time when Paul was approaching his death and he wanted to be sure Timothy appreciated the need for growth and was looking to the right sources for inspiration. The advice Paul gave to Timothy who was the pastor of the church at Ephesus is, in many ways, applicable to us in our walk and ministry in Christ. Paul's advice focused on three facets: (1) Follow the example of Godly people. (2) Stay with the basic principles. (3) Do what you do diligently and faithfully.

**II TIMOTHY 3:10-13** It is one thing to read about characteristics for successful living and we can profit from such learning. However, when we read such things we have a tendency to think these are lofty ideals and we may one day progress toward them; however, we do not really see ourselves operating in that manner. On the other hand, when we encounter a real live example of someone who embodies and practices all the right things, then we are inspired to do likewise because we realize these are not just ideals but are really achievable. Paul served as an impressive example for Timothy and because Paul was faithful to his calling from God, he could say to others "Follow my example." All of us should strive to live our lives in such a way so we could advise others to follow our example because we have done "the right thing."

Our goals in life, the lifestyle we practice and the principles by which we operate must be aligned with each other in a consistent way or our lives will be filled with conflict. A secular example may help us see what this statement means. If a person had a goal in life to become wealthy, then his lifestyle would need to be adjusted so he did not spend everything he had on entertainment and vacations. The principle by which he would need to live would be one that acknowledged the value of diligence and hard work rather than just "getting by." Alignment is also needed in the totality of our lives. We cannot compartmentalize our lives into the religious and the secular or the spiritual and the physical and ignore the influence of one on the other. Timothy had a good example in Paul's goals (purpose), his lifestyle (manner of life) and his principles (doctrine).

There are a number of values characteristic of people who are really successful in life. Among these are faithfulness, tolerance for hardship, genuine love, and the endurance to follow through until the job is done. We tend to associate these with the religious and spiritual part of life, but these characteristics and values are the very ones that are important in **all** of life. We need to be fully committed to what we are doing. We can expect difficulties and roadblocks; however, we must keep our perspective correct regarding the value and worth of people, and have the fortitude to complete a job that is underway.

Paul could point to many examples of the problems he encountered as he was faithful to his call to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Some of these difficulties occurred in Timothy's hometown

of Lystra and it is probable Timothy saw how Paul handled such situations. Such knowledge of how to handle adversity is useful to all Christians because, if we are faithful to God's calling, then we **will** encounter opposition from the world. Paul pointed out to Timothy, evil people are in the world who have different agendas than doing the work of the Lord.

**II TIMOTHY 3:14-17** Everywhere we turn we can find some new philosophy of life someone is promoting. The obvious books and magazine articles on such subjects and the more subtle messages from TV programs and novels advocate a variety of philosophies. As Paul advised Timothy, we too should continue in the teachings of the word of God, because we know these to be correct. It is in the word of God we find our only salvation in Christ Jesus. Though there are many today who question the validity and truth of the Bible, we will find every word is true. We ignore its teachings to our own peril and we faithfully follow its teachings to our benefit. The Bible is truly God's blueprint for us to build our lives on the foundation of Jesus Christ so we can be equipped to live successfully.

**II TIMOTHY 4:1-5** As a pastor, Timothy had certain expectations he was to fulfill in carrying out a successful ministry. Each of us has a ministry or calling in Christ -- there are things we are charged to do in general and because we have been individually gifted with spiritual gifts, there are specific ministries we have. We are expected to carry out our calling and ministry with the help of God through the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives. Not only are we expected to do this, we will be held accountable for it. Even though we don't like to talk about it, Judgement Day is coming.

Timothy's call was to preach the word. Our call is certainly to share the word with others about the love of Jesus. Timothy's call was to reprove, rebuke and encourage. We certainly should have concern enough for others to warn them when we see them going in the wrong direction in life. If you saw someone driving toward a bridge that had been washed out by a flash flood, you could not avoid your responsibility to shout a warning to them to turn back. How can we be any less responsible when we see someone heading for an eternity in hell and not shout a warning (reprove and rebuke)?

We are certainly seeing a trend in our world of people turning away from the truth of God's word and rejecting God from our society. This trend makes it more incumbent on us to proclaim the truth at every opportunity. Just as Paul advised Timothy to make full proof of his ministry, likewise there should not be *any* doubt in anyone's mind we are Christians.