

Leaving a Legacy of Faith (Week 5) 2 Timothy 2:14-26 “Stay The Course”

Introduction

Life is full of distractions. Jesus warned against the things of this world choking off The Word of God from our hearts in His famous “*Parable of The Sower*” (**Matthew 13:21-22**). As we studied last week, if we are to be effective and faithful witnesses for Christ, then we must be singularly focused. This is a foreign concept for many church-goers today, who think that the gospel of Christ is more of a “life insurance policy” to be accepted in a moment of time, and then laid aside until we die and claim our “death benefit of Heaven”. Jesus isn’t calling us to that. He never has, and He never will. He is rather, calling us to follow Him with everything that we have. He wants to be our sole focus, our God. He promises that when we seek Him and His kingdom above all else, then He will be faithful to provide for our physical needs, as well as our spiritual needs (**Matthew 6:33**). Why do churches and ministries fail? Because people begin to place their own selfish desires above those of the kingdom. Paul desired better things of Timothy than for him to live only for himself. Paul wanted Timothy to continue as he himself had done; placing no importance on the things of this world and pledging his undivided devotion to Christ and His gospel. It was a lot to ask, and Paul knew it, especially in a time when people were being executed for their faith. But the old apostle knew that this was the only level of sacrifice that would be acceptable on the day we stand before the judgement seat. Any less would bring shame upon that final day of reckoning. And Paul never wanted Timothy to feel ashamed to stand before The LORD of glory. He wanted him to stay the course.

Paul gave Timothy some specific instructions to follow so that the cares of this life would not choke out his effectiveness. The advice that he gave still rings absolutely true for us, as believers, today. We too are susceptible to being distracted from many directions, and if we do not remain vigilant, we can find ourselves far off course living selfish, empty, and ineffective lives. This is a disastrous reality to those who would long to leave behind a legacy of faith. You see, the devil knows how to tempt us with shiny things. He also knows that with enough discouragement he can talk us into “leaving our post”, as it were. The devil would love to make you a “deserter” from the army of Christ. Every church that I have ever attended had the empty pews (or chairs) of those who had deserted their “posts” for one reason or another. I have seen it time and again. Someone was once aflame in the service of The LORD and just as quickly as that flame was kindled, it was snuffed out by one of the devils schemes. Christianity is not about how you start, but how you finish. The Bible teaches that those of us who truly believe will endure till the very end (**Matthew 24:12**). Quitting on Christ has never been an option for the true believer, and if one thing could be said of the Apostle Paul, he was no quitter! I’m not talking about salvation by works here, but the one who has truly been saved by grace, through faith, will absolutely respond with acts of service (**James 2:14-16**), and Satan will do everything that he possible can to make it stop.

Paul wanted Timothy to finish the race, so He instructed Him how to keep himself pure in order to remain faithful. Timothy had been appointed to accomplish great things for the furtherance of The Kingdom. He simply had to concern himself, as any good worker should do, with the task at hand; not allowing himself to be distracted by trivial matters. Paul admonished Timothy to do just that by diligently Studying The Scriptures, by Separating From Sin, and by Shepherding his Flock, so that they could do likewise. If he would follow these good instructions, then he would truly be a “faithful worker, who need not be ashamed” (**vs. 15**). This is sound and Godly wisdom for the rest of us today as well.

Study The Scriptures

Paul warns Timothy that his focus should be on the Word of God, and therefore, not to be distracted by ridiculous speculations. There are lots of folks out there who would try and add their opinions to the scriptures, but the Word of God is complete and accurate. It contains all of the instruction that is needed to live a Godly life. In a world that wishes to marry man’s psychology with God’s inerrant

truth, it is incumbent upon us to keep the two completely separate. Over the centuries many false teachers have tried to “water down” and “sugar coat” the truth of scripture to make it more palatable to the listener. Paul actually warns Timothy that this will happen later on in this letter (**2 Timothy 4:3**). Paul admonishes Timothy to carefully avoid what he calls “quarrels about words” (**vs.14**). The Greek word that he uses here “*Logomacheo*”, carries with it the idea of “waging a war” over words. In short, Paul is warning his young protege to avoid arguing with false teachers, who have no concept of understanding scripture from a spiritual perspective. It is the Holy Spirit who enables the believer to understand the truths of scripture, and therefore, to fight about the meaning of scripture with one who does not possess the Holy Spirit is a waste of time. Jesus instructed His disciples in a very similar fashion, telling them **“do not cast your pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6)**. Only when The Holy Spirit brings a man under conviction will he be susceptible to comprehending the Word of God. It is The Spirit who gives us the **“ears to hear” (Revelation 2:29)**. One who would fight with you over scripture is obviously in that moment unable to “hear” it. You cannot beat people over the head with your Bible to bring them into the kingdom of God. Trust me, many before you have tried and failed.

It is within the Church, however, that false doctrine can NEVER be tolerated. The only way to prevent false doctrine within the body is for the leaders of the church to diligently study and teach the scriptures. Truth must be taught above all else. Churches die when sound doctrine is ignored. Though we are not called to fight with those outside the body, we are most definitely called to stand for God’s truth within. This is no time for “lazy preachers”. This is the time for faithful men to **“study to show themselves approved” (vs. 15)**. The word Paul uses there for “study” (be diligent - NIV) is “*spoudazo*” in the Greek, and it means “to be zealous in the accomplishment of a goal”, much like Paul had earlier admonished Timothy to compete as an athlete competing for a prize. Paul is explaining here to Timothy that in order to be able to stand in the face of so much false teaching, one must work diligently at studying the Word of God, in order to confidently teach it with accuracy and clarity. In short, every believer ought to “know their Bible” intimately, so that no one can lead them astray with dime store psychology and man made spiritualism. A believer who doesn’t spend serious time in The Word can easily be led astray into destructive heresy.

Before I was a preacher, I was a banker. I remember having to attend a course on Counterfeit Money. We were told that one of the greatest dangers to our national monetary system was the printing and circulation of counterfeit bills. When I took the class, I half expected that we would be given lots of phony bills to study so that we would know what to look for. To my surprise, we hardly even looked at counterfeit money at all, but instead, we carefully and purposefully studied the characteristics of genuine U.S. currency. The simple fact was; that the more you knew about the real thing, the easier it was to spot a fake! The same is true of false doctrine. If you want to be able to separate truth from falsehood, diligently study THE TRUTH, and the lies will become obvious in the light of God’s perfect word.

Paul tells Timothy that if he would diligently study the word, then he would be able to stand in God’s presence unashamed (**vs. 15**). You see, Jesus said that if we loved Him, we would obey His commands. When we dedicate ourselves to knowing those commands, and by His Spirit, obeying those commands, then we will have nothing to fear when we are called to stand in His presence! So **“Do your BEST to PRESENT YOURSELF to God as a WORKMAN who does NOT need to be ASHAMED and correctly HANDLES the WORD OF TRUTH.” (2 Timothy 2:15)**.

Separate From Sin

The next thing Paul does is tell young Timothy that to be able to stand firm against temptation and false teachers is to be set apart for the Holy Spirit to use. God intends for His people to be holy. The word actually means to be “set apart” for a noble purpose. Paul uses the illustration of a large home filled with all types of furnishings. I imagine that most of the ladies out there can fully understand what Paul is talking about. When I was a kid, my mom had a separate set of dishes that she kept for special occasions when we had guests over for dinner. These “china” dishes were only used for those special occasions. They had been “set apart” for noble purposes (**vs.21**). It is interesting to note that our toilet bowl was actually constructed out of the same basic material as those dishes, but it certainly did not achieve similar status in our humble home.

If we are to be used of God and not be distracted by the things of this world, then we, like fine china, have to be separated from what is common and profane, and be holy. This is a natural progression for a student of The Word. For it is by diligently searching the Word of God that we will know just how to be holy. To be holy is to separate ourselves from sin. Sinfulness is only fitting for the carnal minded (**“ignoble vessels” vs. 20**), but to be dead to sin by the power of The Holy Spirit is to become a “noble vessel” fit to be used for The LORD’S purpose. It really comes down to this; do you want to be a china cup or a toilet bowl? The choice is simply a matter of sanctification. That is a large “churchy” word which simply means Holiness.

When a person surrenders their life to Christ, they are washed clean by his precious blood and forgiven of all unrighteousness, but they still have some “growing” to do. The Holy Spirit fills them and begins to lead them into the ways of holiness. He guides them to The Word of God, and little by little, day by day, the new born believer begins to yield more and more of their life over to The Spirit, as they strive to obey The Word. The Spirit of God changes them from the inside out, and they begin to “grow in Christ” to spiritual maturity. This is how the child of God moves from a common vessel to a holy one. The Word and The Spirit work in conjunction within us. This, in turn, changes the way that we view the world around us. The things that we once found pleasurable, when we were in sin, will no longer give us any lasting joy. Paul tells Timothy to **“Flee from the evil desires of his youth and run toward righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on The LORD out of a pure heart.” (2 Timothy 2:22).**

Any time that I speak to young Christians about how to avoid the sins of their flesh, I tell them to just “Second Timothy two twenty-two it!” Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. Old things are passed away and all things become new (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). Do you want to leave behind a legacy of faith? Then be sanctified by The Spirit. Get away from filthy sins as fast as you can and strive for RIGHTEOUSNESS (purity), FAITH (trusting God in all things), LOVE (agape that causes you to love others as God loves), and finally PEACE (the indescribable feeling of knowing you are in God’s will). These are the by-products of living a life that is “set apart” for God’s purposes. They can be yours today, if you are but willing to separate yourself from sin and be made holy.

Shepherd the Sheep

“And The LORD’S servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and they will come to their senses and escape the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.” 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

I grew up on a farm. I have raised both cattle and sheep, and the two are vastly different. While cattle can be driven, sheep must be led. They will follow a shepherd, but they will run and scatter when a stranger comes up behind them. All throughout scripture, people are compared to sheep. Paul wanted young Timothy to understand that if he were to have any success persuading lost sheep to come into the “fold” (respond to the gospel and be saved), then he would have to lead them there and not drive them. People tend not to care how much you know, until they know how much that you care! If we, as messengers for Christ, would only apply this methodology, I imagine that we would lead far more people to Christ. We must learn to gently “shepherd the flock”, remembering all the while that God loves them, Christ died for them, and The Spirit will convict them, if we but **“speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15)**. As I have stated previously, you cannot win someone to Christ by hitting them over the head with your big heavy King James Bible!

Are we going to have opposition? Of COURSE we will! But how can we prove that Christ has changed our sin nature if we are just as loud and argumentative as the people of this world? Answer: We cannot. Jesus commands us to love even our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us (**Matthew 5:44**). Does that come natural? No, it comes from being Spirit Filled. Remember that Paul wrote this while he was chained to a wall awaiting his execution, and yet, he saw it as an opportunity to share Christ with others who had not heard of His grace. We know that during his house arrest years earlier, he had

even witnessed to the guards who kept watch over him (**Philippians 1:13**). It is really hard to argue with a guy who just loves you in return! That's the kind of Christian that Christ wants us to be.

"*Christian*": the word actually means "little Christ". If we are going to call ourselves after Him, then we must BE like Him. I once heard that Alexander The Great was marching his massive army into battle when he saw a young soldier cowering in a ditch alongside the road. He stopped and asked the man what was the matter with him, thinking he had suffered some kind of injury. The young man was crying as he looked up at Alexander and said, "I'm so afraid, that I cannot continue." The emperor asked the cowardly soldier his name to which he replied, "Alexander, sir." Alexander The Great responded in furious rage and told the soldier, "Either find your courage or change your name!" You see, Alexander The Great did not wish to have a coward who shared his name.

In the same way, Jesus expects us to be like Him, if we claim His name and call ourselves "Christian". The Savior laid down His life for the very people who had despised and rejected Him. When the soldiers drove the nails into His hands and feet He prayed, "**Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.**" Jesus died for us while we were still sinners (**Romans 5:8**). He didn't wait for us to clean up our act before He loved us. He loved us so that HE could clean us up! If we are to be effective witnesses for His kingdom, if we are to leave behind His legacy of faith, then we must go and do likewise. Be a shepherd to the sheep, not a cattle drover! Speak the truth IN LOVE.

In conclusion, if we are to leave a legacy of faith, we MUST stay the course, not allowing the cares of this life or other silly distractions to cause us to stray away from the path that God has laid out for us. In order to do this, we must STUDY The WORD, SEPARATE from SIN, and always remember to SHEPHERD the SHEEP. Don't try to argue anyone into the kingdom, just lead them in with your knowledge of the truth and a holy lifestyle. Live what you believe every single moment in their presence, for people would rather SEE a sermon than hear one any day!

And ALL of God's people said... TRUTH!!!