

Ministerial Instructions

Call to Worship: Psalm 150

Hymn #3 (Supp)- *Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*

1st Scripture: Acts 20:17-38

Hymn Insert- *Speak O Lord*

2nd Scripture: 1 Timothy 4:12-16

Hymn Insert- *Power of the Cross*

Introduction

Paul has been going to great lengths to compel Timothy to take a stand against the false teachers, who have infiltrated the church at Ephesus with poisonous doctrines that contradict the Gospel. He has reminded Timothy of the great charge and responsibility that he has, as a leader in the church, which is God's house, the church of the living God and the pillar and ground of divine truth. And last time, we saw how Timothy would serve to nourish his own soul, in the very process of guarding and maintaining the doctrine of the church, unto a pursuit of true godliness, which has great benefit in this life and in the life to come.

This morning, Paul continues to exhort Timothy, particularly, as he is concerned about how some of the people might seek to highlight Timothy's youth as an area of weakness, bringing his wisdom and leadership into question. And this then leads Paul to address various additional ministerial instructions that he wants to leave with Timothy.

I. Let No One Despise Your Youth

And so, Paul begins by stating, "Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

Upon close examination, we find Paul doing two things here. First, he brings forth a concern, and then, he brings forth a solution to that concern.

1) The concern: Timothy is young. Timothy is in a leadership position, which requires him to contend with others who are seeking to influence the church with false teachings.

Timothy's youth might be seen as a weakness, bringing his wisdom and maturity into question.

We are all familiar with these types of situations, aren't we? Mom or dad won't even hear son or daughter's contrasting opinion, because, after all, they are the kids. Older brother/sister has a hard time taking advice or correction from younger brother/sister, because, they are

younger. Aged church member, who changed the pastor's/deacon's diapers when he was younger, has a hard time submitting to his authority because of the age difference...etc. And so, Paul's concern, especially in that culture, where younger people generally respected their elders (and rightly so), was a valid one.

This being the case, Paul exhorts Timothy, not to disrespect those who might look down upon his youthfulness, but rather, to not allow them, in their pride, to despise him or to render him ineffective and useless, simply because of the age difference. Timothy ought to live and act in keeping with the gifts, which the Holy Spirit has deposited in him, and not on the basis of how long he has lived upon the earth. He ought not to allow others, who would challenge his youth, to get into his head or render him ineffective because of his youth.

Now, Timothy might ask, "Brother Paul, how then ought I to handle such people? What should I do to those who seek to despise me because of my youth?" Anticipating such questions, Paul provides a biblical solution. And right from the outset, we notice that that solution does not include disrespecting such people, arguing with such people, or even defending himself against such people (which might be my natural tendency, if I were in Timothy's shoes).

2) The Solution: "But be an example to the believers (*all believers in general, and not just targeting those who might despise his youth*) in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity." And so, how ought Timothy not to allow others to despise his youth? By providing all of the believers with a consistent pattern of maturity and growth in the Christian faith, that would distinguish him from those who live and act in youthful ways. By the way that he speaks with his mouth, acts with his body, loves with his heart, evidences proper motives with his spirit, exercises a living faith by his walk, and keeps himself pure from fleshly defilement. Because, God looks upon these virtues and not the age, when he renders a man fit for ministry or not. And in this sense, many times even, you will find Christians who are young in age, but very mature in the faith. And, at other times, you will find those who are well advanced in years, but who have grown very little in the faith. And so, Paul exhorts Timothy to combat attacks against his youth, by living as a mature Christian, blameless and wise in the faith.

Now, because such growth comes through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, it is no wonder then, that Paul's following ministerial instructions, while serving an edifying purpose in themselves, also compel Timothy further in the direction of spiritual growth and maturity.

II. Ministerial Instructions

"Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (vs. 13). Here, the Apostle would have Timothy give himself to three primary disciplines, until he himself arrives at Ephesus. And this is not an exhaustive list of ministerial duties, as if Paul would fail to include such things as prayer or communion...etc, but rather, it is a list of those universal, critical pastoral disciplines that are especially relevant in the present context, where the church is being bombarded by damnable error. And you'll notice that the first of these disciplines is the fountain, out of which, the following two, spring forth.

1) Give attention to *reading*. Now, we are not to understand the *public* reading of the Word of God, by this specific charge, as important as that practice is. But rather, Paul here speaks of Timothy's own private study of the Word of God, which would continually serve to aid his own spiritual growth, especially as a means of saturating his own soul with biblical truths that would enable him to lead and teach the people under his care. If the well is going to meet the needs of thirsty souls, then it must be filled with good water. And that water is the Word of God, which Timothy himself (and any true minister of the gospel) must daily drink in, if he expects to have something profitable to draw from, in his ministering to others. And so, Paul exhorts Timothy to consciously give attention to his own private reading and meditating upon the Word of God. And then, out of this first discipline, two others ought to spring out.

2) Give attention to *exhortation*. As Timothy reads and meditates upon the Word, he is to draw out of that resource, as a means of exhorting others. He is to stir up others unto faithful obedience to the will of God; to the teachings and commands of Christ, in accordance with what he takes from God's Word, in his own private reading. He is to search out God's will, found in the Word, and he is to present it to others, as a means of edification, and as a means of guarding them from all falsehood, which serves to corrupt the Christian life. And so, his exhortations would include warnings, rebukes and encouragements, all unto the end of leading the flock unto

godly living, in accordance with the will of God (given in His Word), and not manmade traditions or wive's tales.

3) Finally, Paul exhorts Timothy to give attention to *doctrine*. As we have hopefully seen, over and over again, in this short Epistle, doctrine does indeed matter, greatly. Here Timothy is exhorted to grow in and teach the many critical doctrines that are found in God's holy Word, concerning the person of God (Theology Proper), the nature and condition of man (anthropology), the great teachings surrounding God's work of redemption and salvation (soteriology, Christology, pneumatology...etc) all unto the edification of the body...because, as we've seen all along, doctrine matters! What you believe (about God, about man, about Christ, about redemption and salvation, about the Holy Spirit and the Trinity...etc) will affect how you live.

And so, all in all, Timothy is to give attention to these three disciplines (reading, exhortation and doctrine), because in doing so, he himself will grow and maintain personal maturity, and furthermore, he will be able to instruct the church away from false teachings and toward the true and pure doctrines of Christ.

Following this charge then, Paul adds an additional personal nudge, to Timothy's conscience, once again, showing that all that he is commanding Timothy in this letter, must be embraced and pursued with a proactive and conscious effort. Timothy must consciously work at obeying these commands, for they will not come naturally. And so, Paul adds, "Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership" (vs. 14).

"Timothy, remember your calling. God is the source of your call, and this was confirmed both by prophecy and by the laying on of the hands of the eldership, who has, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, set you apart unto your present ministry. Therefore, do not quench the Spirit by neglecting to exercise the gift that He has deposited in you. You have the responsibility Timothy of stirring up, developing, and making use of that gift. Feel the weight of God's calling upon you, and let that erode away, any fear of man that might pressure you from doing all that I am commanding you here." [Recall 1:18-20 and feel again, the compelling nature of this letter, directed toward the conscience of Timothy]

And verse 15, "Meditate on these things (think upon them; roll them around in your mind and conscience continually); give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all."

Again, we find Paul emphasizing the fact that Timothy must consciously pursue these things. He cannot live a "conveyor belt" Christianity, that simply takes things in stride, and comes along for the ride. He needs to be a proactive mover and shaker, seeking to process, study, absorb, learn and apply all that Paul has been commanding him here. He must be a good steward of God's Word; reading it, meditating upon it, consciously looking for ways to rightly divide and apply it. He must see himself in a war...in a war for the truth; truth which sets free and grants life, in the face of falsehood, which binds and condemns. He must consciously look for relevant ways to apply and exhort and teach the will of God, within his present sphere and context. He must adopt and embrace an active duty, "we are at war," mindset. He must give himself entirely to this task, letting no idol, hindrance, disturbance or distraction get in the way. Souls are at stake! The responsibility is great and requires great attention and care!

In doing this, his progress will be evident to all...not as a means of giving Timothy a reason to boast or to "showboat" his accomplishments, but rather, as a means of affirming his calling, and gaining the respect of the brethren, especially in the light of his youthfulness. It is a doorway into their hearts, a means of unlatching their ears, so that they will respectfully give attention to what he says, giving heed to his leadership, recognizing by his own growth and commitment, God's calling upon him. In this way, his own life and personal holiness will provide a viable and respected means of transport, for God's infallible will, to the Brethren.

Finally, Paul adds this concluding, additional and powerfully convicting statement (given in verse 16): "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you."

A very clear warning for Timothy to consciously watch, to guard and to protect, first himself. That is, that Timothy must guard his own sanctity and purity, lest he should be caught off guard and made to stumble, which would not only prove to be detrimental to himself, but to those under his charge, as well. It is bad enough to stumble yourself, but to cause others to stumble as well; to be the cause of the demise of others, is absolutely terrifying. ["Better to have

a millstone tied around your neck and be tossed into the ocean than to cause one of these little ones who believe in Me, to stumble!]

And then, Timothy is also charged to take heed; to carefully watch over and protect the doctrine. That Doctrine, which saves and which sanctifies, and which was presently under attack, and which is always under attack, must be carefully guarded by those in leadership. The buck ultimately stops with them, if they fall asleep on their watch. And so, Timothy was called to guard the doctrine; to guard the food that was brought into the fold, lest the sheep be poisoned by the teachings of ravenous wolves. In Acts, Paul, speaking (interestingly enough) to the *Ephesian* elders, exhorted them to take heed to themselves and to the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit had made them overseers, because ravenous wolves would enter in, not sparing the flock with their poisonous teachings. And here, what Paul had spoken of beforehand, was actually happening. And so, Paul gives Timothy this charge, to guard himself and the doctrine!

And in doing so (in continuing in the true doctrine; committing himself to reading, exhortation and doctrine), Paul reveals a positive consequence that would come about from such careful watching. Timothy would save himself and those who hear him. And what does Paul mean by this? That Timothy is, in some way, able to save the souls under his care? Certainly, not in the way that only Christ can save sinners (not in an atoning or redemptive way), but rather, Paul has these two ideas in mind:

1) Timothy would be a "God ordained" means of causing himself and others to abide in Christ, which would bring them to the end of their salvation. He would serve to keep himself and the church from apostatizing and turning away from the truth in Christ. He would be a tool of perseverance, used by the Holy Spirit, to guide the church, unto the end of working out her salvation. And in this sense, as an instrument of God, he could be said to save himself and others, by his faithful, protective care.

2) He would save both himself and those who hear him, from gross error. In shielding and protecting the flock from gross error; in committing himself to faithfully reading, exhorting and teaching biblical doctrine, he would be the means of delivering the church from damnable error. And so, in these senses, Timothy could be said to save both himself and those who hear him, by following Paul's instructions.

III. Concluding Thoughts and Applications

1) Note, time, in and of itself, is not the determining factor for Christian maturity. In other words, how old an individual is, or even how long someone has been a Christian, does not, in and of itself, indicate the level of maturity that an individual has reached. And sadly, some people use the, "Look, I've been a Christian for umpteen years" argument, as a means of brushing off the wisdom to be taken from younger Christians.

Now, don't get me wrong, I do believe that younger people should respect those who are older. In fact, Paul will charge Timothy to this end, in the beginning of Chapter five. Age does warrant respect, and sadly, that is all but lost in our culture. However, age does not always determine spiritual maturity. The gifting of the Holy Spirit, and how much stirring up of those gifts an individual does, and how faithfully an individual walks with the Lord, will ultimately shape the level of maturity, each individual reaches. To be sure, sadly, there are some Christians, who are well aged, but who, because of a neglect of the means of grace and a stubborn refusal to submit to the convicting promptings of the Holy Spirit, hardly seem to grow at all. Like the recipients of the letter to the Hebrews, while they ought to be eating spiritual steak, they still haven't gotten beyond drinking milk. And then, there are those who, while young in the faith, seem to drink everything in with great fervor and excitement, and tend to advance early, beyond their natural years, in a spiritual sense. Timothy, both, by the calling and empowering of the Holy Spirit, as well as, by His eager commitment to cooperate with the Holy Spirit (and to grow spiritually), was fit to preside over the church at Ephesus, at least for a time.

2) Let us learn from Paul's charge to Timothy, the biblical and God-honoring way of overcoming false perceptions that people may have of us. Again, while Paul exhorts Timothy to let no one despise his youth, he also exhorts Timothy to live faithfully, as a means of overcoming the assumptions of those who would seek to use his youth, as a means of discrediting his authority. Paul never tells Timothy to defend himself, to argue his point, or to respond in kind to those who attack him. No, he rather exhorts him to give them no reason to validate such accusations, by living in such a way that would affirm his spiritual maturity.

And so, Brethren, see that, in life, people may embrace many unfair or wrong perceptions about us. And we can complain and attack and defend and do everything in our pride to

challenge these perceptions verbally. However, the best means of ultimately discrediting them, is by living maturely in the fear of God, leaving Him to vindicate us. Let us, by our example, look to win the hearts of others, so that they might be ashamed of, and forsake, any wrong perceptions they may have about us. Do not overcome evil with evil, but rather, overcome evil with good; with grace and with love, always keeping the bigger picture of Christ's glory, in mind.

3) See the constant reminder of Scripture, to live out your Christian life, by *consciously* pursuing obedience to Christ. In how many different ways, does Paul compel Timothy to actively give heed to his commands? "Meditate on these things, remember your calling, bring to mind these things, take heed, pursue"...etc. All throughout this letter, and all throughout the Scriptures, we keep seeing, over and over again, that the Christian life requires work, effort, conscious focus, determination, diligence, perseverance...it is a war and a fight, Brethren. And the "conveyor belt" Christianity, which is often modeled in our country today, is not the Christianity of the Bible. This casual, sit back and relax, complacent, "live the best of both worlds" Christianity, is so far removed from the cross bearing, take heed and watch, put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit, fight the good fight, Christianity, exemplified all throughout Scripture. Shallow, "Easy Chair," Christianity is a fake. It is an impostor to true Christianity, brethren, and we need to understand this! Where is the sense of urgency and commitment and zeal that we find in the Scriptures? Perhaps, it is smothered by the American dream? If you are sleeping, Brethren, plead with God to stir your soul awake, unto a conscious state, lest you be caught off guard, and unprepared for the Lord, when He returns, or when He calls you to Himself! [Remember, gifts can be stirred up or neglected. The Spirit can be quenched!]

4) Finally, in witnessing again the weight of responsibility that lies on the back of the leadership of the church, whether we realize it or not, please pray for us...that we would fulfill the purpose of our call, and that, we would be faithful watchmen. Pray that we would be good stewards of the Word; reading it, exhorting and teaching from it; prayerfully and wholly depending upon it!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25