

3. No fly-by-night allowed

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Nowadays it is not easy to find people who are loyal to their jobs, their spouses, etc.. That is why divorce is rampant and people change their jobs often. Even twenty years ago, it was not unusual to hear people having their twentieth or thirtieth wedding anniversaries. But now, if a married couple makes their one month wedding anniversary, they should celebrate it for longevity.

I remember one of my former coworkers who used to change his job every two years. Never stayed in the same place. If I was a human resource manager, I would never hire that man. The same kind of thing shows far more in the top management of Corporate America. The average length of CEOs in America is three years or less. They jack up their profit margins from reducing the company's expenses by removing a bunch of bottom line and elderly employees. Then they jump out with golden parachutes for the next company.

It is just plain hard to find loyalty from people. But the Lord our God expects us to be loyal to Him, to His Word and to the fellow believers of Jesus Christ.

This morning we find ourselves eavesdropping on apostle Paul's instructions to his spiritual son Timothy about being loyal.

A. BE LOYAL TO THE TRUTH IN FAITH AND LOVE

2 Timothy 1:13-14 Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 14 That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

1) Hold fast

The Greek word for 'Hold fast' is "echo". It has a deep meaning of "to hold one's self to a thing, to lay hold of a thing, to adhere or cling to". In our terms, it would be 'stick with it'.

Throughout the centuries God's work has been done by men and women who stood steadfast in their hours of trial. It would have been convenient for them to have compromised, but they stood firm. In other words, they were not fly-by-night people.

As God had given the deposit of spiritual truth to Paul who, in turn, had given to Timothy, we have the truth of God – how to live and to tell about the Lord Jesus Christ. It is our solemn responsibility to 'hold fast' and 'guard' the precious deposit of Christian truth and to pass it to others.

2) Pattern

The word 'pattern' means an 'outline, sketch, example, brief and summary exposition'. In other words, we ought to hold fast to what is given to us, not creating our own opinions that would go against the truth.

It takes a special man or woman to truly hold fast the pattern of sound words from the Lord Jesus. It takes someone who is not tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men. I know a person who would believe just about everything that some of the misguided TV evangelists claim. The reason why this person believes whatever they say is that this person is immature and choose not to understand the Word of God.

This does not only happen among Christian believers in general, but also among pastors and Bible teachers. Many pastors are often evaluated according to many people's unbiblical measurement of "he's really funny" or "he's really exciting" or "he's never boring". The true measure is to ask, "Does my pastor hold fast the pattern of sound words?"

3) Sound words

What would be the pattern of sound words? It is true teachings according to God's truth without any compromise which only can be detected by the discerning heart.

God uses human instruments to communicate His eternal truth. As the Lord used Paul to communicate the pattern of sound words to Timothy, God uses His men and women to communicate that same truth today.

Romans 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Let me ask you this: How many of you have received a salvation message directly from Jesus Himself without any human's teaching or sermon? None of us. We all had someone who introduced us to Jesus Christ, whether it was one-on-one setting or in the middle of a massive crusade. God's salvation came through someone's voice or a track which was handed to you by someone.

4) In faith and love

Faith and love describe how the truth is to be held. We hold it in faith, truly believing it and applying it to our lives. At the same time, we must hold it in love, not in proud arrogance or self-seeking superiority.

Speaking the truth in love should be the divine pattern. How easy for us to become pugnacious in our desire to defend the faith, or a witch-hunter who creates problems!

However, love without faith in truth is a disaster waiting to happen, like a massive flood without banks to contain it.

5) That good thing which was committed to you

What good things has God committed to you? His Word? A family? Time? Gifts and talents? An education? Are you being faithful with those things? We live in a time where faithfulness is only expected so long as it serves our own interests. When it stops being in our immediate advantage to be faithful, many people feel just fine about giving up their responsibility. But this is not honoring to God.

Being faithful to God means having the heart to do what is right even when it seems to be crazy to do so. God is faithful with what we commit to Him. Will we be faithful with what He has committed to us?

6) keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us

It was the Holy Spirit who committed the truth to Timothy, and He would help him guard it. Apart from the ministry of the Spirit, we are in the dark when it comes to understanding the Word of God. It is He who must teach us and enable us to guard the truth and share it with others.

From the beginning of human history, satan has opposed God's Word.

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed

said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

It was Satan's first recorded conversation to mankind, and he continues to ask that question. Throughout the history of the church, the Word of God has been attacked, often by people within the church; yet it still stands today. Why? Because dedicated men and women have – like Paul and Timothy – guarded the deposit and faithfully handed it to a new generation of Christians.

When a church or any other Christian organization goes liberal, it usually starts with a weakening of their leaders' convictions about the Word of God.

Matthew 26:31 Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'

The day a pastor starts to compromise the Word of God from the pulpit, it should be the day his congregation kicks him out of their church. But many churches don't do anything other than follow their pastors blindly.

Matthew 15:14 Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.

B. BE LOYAL TO GOD'S SERVANTS

2 Timothy 1:15-18 This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. 16 The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; 17 but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me. 18 The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day--and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me at Ephesus.

When you read Asia in the NT, it doesn't mean the Far Eastern continent as it does today. It means the Roman province of Asia, which today would mostly be Turkey. The province of Asia in that day comprised the Roman districts of Lydia, Mysia, Caria and Phrygia.

Paul was forbidden to minister in this area on his second missionary journey. But on his third journey, he stayed nearly three years in Ephesus, the capital of Asia, and evangelized the entire area. The seven churches of Asia that were mentioned in the Book of Revelation 1 through 3 were all in this area.

We do not know who Phygellus and Hermogenes were. Their names will be known as deserters as long as the Bible exists on earth. Aren't you glad that the Bible is no longer being written? Otherwise, your names and my name might end up in the Bible for others to study. No thanks.

These two men were examples of those who did not hold fast. Apparently, these were "fair-weather friends" of Paul, who did not faithfully continue on with him when times got tough.

Apostle Paul names two deserters – probably the best known – in order to put a stop to these slanderous attacks. It is still a common practice of the ones who leave the church to make slanderous attacks against pastors and leaders of the church to cover up their own disgraceful conduct by inventing whatever accusations they can come up with.

It was certainly a dark hour for Paul. But there was one man who dared to leave his home in Ephesus and came to Rome to assist Paul – Onesiphorus. His name means “profit-bearing,” and he certainly was a profitable friend to the apostle. Like Phygellus and Hemogenes, we don’t know anything about Onesiphorus either. But one thing for sure, he was a real friend, encourager and co-laborer in Jesus Christ to Paul.

Let me add here that every pastor is grateful for those faithful in the church congregation who assist him in the work of the Lord. I myself am thankful to the Lord for all the people in our church who assist me, encourage me, pray for me, work with me, reproof me, urge me to continue and just simply be there for me when I am down and out.

There were a few times when I actually thought being a pastor didn’t seem worth all the troubles I was going through. My wife Karen reminded me, “The ones who want to hurt you are only a handful. But think about the congregation who loves you.” As the apostle Paul said to Timothy in v18, may all of you find mercy from the Lord in that day.

In his first imprisonment in Rome, Paul was in his own house. But this time he was in a Roman dungeon under careful guard. But Onesiphorus was persistent. He located Paul and risked his own life to stand with him and assist him.

Jay Kesler, former president of Youth for Christ said once, “One of my goals in life is to wind up with eight men who are willing to carry one of my casket handles.”

Paul described Onesiphorus’ ministry as a refreshment – like a breath of fresh air in the midst of dark, damp and stuffy dungeon, like a glass of cool clear drinking water in the midst of scorching heat.

I remember this like yesterday: My daughter Michelle was small. One day she got an ouie, she started to cry. Big tears were rolling down from her big brown eyes. When her mommy held her close and started to blow a cool air gently on her ouie, her cry started to subside, and the quivering lips turned to a big smile. What made a change? Knowing that her mommy loved her, comforted her and encouraged her.

Do you remember the time when you were absolutely pushed down, shoved against a corner, kicked around? Then, do you remember somebody who cared enough to come by, somebody who dared to believe in you, somebody who was not ashamed of being associated with you, somebody who pulled you up, somebody who reached out and helped you spiritually, physically and financially? Now, it is your turn to refresh others.

When is the last time you refreshed another Christian with your kind words, cards, phone calls, e-mails, gentle smiles, good hugs or firm handshakes to let him or her know that you care about that person and you would stand by that person?

D. APPLICATIONS

1) Faithfulness now is preparation for blessed service later.

How we serve the Lord today will help determine our reward and ministry when He comes to establish His kingdom on earth.

2) If Jesus cannot be our Lord all the time, He doesn't want to be our Lord at all.

Jesus doesn't want to be a Sunday Jesus only, rather Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and everyday Jesus in your lives.

E. CHALLENGE

Whom would God have you be an Onesiphorus to?

Whom would God have you diligently seek out, not be ashamed of, and refresh?

You may say, "I am still going through a difficulty." You will be surprised how much you, yourself, will be encouraged while you minister to others. That is the divine mathematics unbelievers do not understand.