

Letters For Leaders – 2 Timothy (Part 9)

The four letters we are studying in this series were written by the Apostle Paul, probably while he was in prison toward the end of his ministry. They are unique among all his writings because they are PERSONAL, addressed to individuals in leadership roles rather than to churches as a whole. Also, Paul has had a “mentoring role” in the lives and ministries of each of these young leaders, so he feels at liberty to speak freely. Here more than anywhere else we see Paul being transparent about ministry.

When Paul wrote the letter we know as 2 Timothy, his situation had changed drastically. He was in prison in Rome and facing certain death (4:6 – “the time of my departure is at hand”). He MAY have been in prison when he wrote the other letters we have studied in this series; he definitely WAS in prison this time. Almost all of his associates in ministry were gone, and only Luke was at the Apostle's side to assist him (4:11 – “only Luke is with me”). It was certainly a dark hour in his ministry. But Paul's concern was not for himself; it was for Timothy and the church.

2 Timothy 2:1-2 Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

It has often been said, “Success without a successor is a failure.” Paul exhorts Timothy to take everything he has experienced and learned, and TRANSMIT it to the next generation. Those he appoints to leadership are to be FAITHFUL, and they are to be TEACHERS of others. (Remember, not everyone teaches in the same way!) Paul then gives us a few examples of what **LEADERSHIP** looks like in the Apostolic church ...

2 Timothy 2:3-7 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully. The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits. Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.

SOLDIER. Leaders must be able to undergo hardship (“hardness”) without breaking under the pressure. They must also avoid worldly entanglements that would distract them from their service to God.

ATHLETE. Leaders should strive for success (“masteries”), but they must work according to God's principles (“lawfully”). Only God's work done in God's way has God's blessing. Leaders must be ethical.

FARMER. Leaders who work hard in God's field must be “first partaker of the fruits.” This certainly can reference financial support for full-time leaders; however, remember that they were the exception in the New Testament. There is another way that leaders must be “first partaker,” and that is in setting an EXAMPLE for others to follow.

2 Timothy 2:8-9 Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.

Paul wants Timothy to remember that, if Jesus rose from the dead and defeated humanity's last enemy first (1 Corinthians 15:26), then nothing can hinder His church – not even Paul's imprisonment and impending death! **Paul says, “I may be bound, but the WORD is not bound!”**

2 Timothy 2:10-13 Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

Paul knows he is not only enduring hardship for his own spiritual benefit, but for the benefit of the church. He will go through anything – willingly, cheerfully, and confidently – if it helps further the cause of the gospel!

This “FAITHFUL SAYING” is probably part of an early statement of faith memorized and recited by believers. There are others in his personal letters – 1 Timothy 1:15, 1 Timothy 4:9, Titus 3:8. They would encourage one another with these words ...

If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him:

If we suffer, we shall also reign with him:

If we deny him, he also will deny us:

If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful:

He cannot deny himself.

Think about this! Death leads to life! Suffering leads to reigning with Him! So all that is important – in the 1st century and in the 21st century – is to not deny the Lord, no matter what we are going through. Because if we deny Him, He will deny us – and we will forfeit Heaven and all its rewards. However, even if we do stop believing in Jesus, He is still faithful and He will be there the moment we turn back to Him – as long as we don't come too late! No matter how unfaithful we are, God cannot stop being faithful – to do so would be to deny Himself and His nature.

If suffering and death lead to eternal life, we have nothing to fear!

2 Timothy 2:14-15 Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

In contrast to the “faithful saying” Paul has just mentioned, he reminds Timothy that many other opinions are “words to no profit” – they are not worth arguing about, and they only “subvert” (Greek: “katastrepho” / English: “catastrophe” / “overthrow, overturn, demolish, apostatize”) those who hear them. As leaders, we must teach people which is which.

WORKMAN. We cannot LEAD others properly unless we LIVE properly! The word “study” (“spoudazo” = “make effort, be diligent, be earnest”) doesn’t refer to BOOKS, but to BEHAVIOR. A workman needs to work hard so he won’t be ashamed when his work is inspected. The phrase “rightly dividing” means “cutting straight,” as in plowing a field, sewing a seam, or cutting a board. The WORD is our tool to do God’s work, and we are responsible to use it and teach it correctly! This verse is not against “study,” but is emphasizing that our study must be applied to our own lives first, and then accurately transmitted to those we are leading.

2 Timothy 2:16-19 But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

In contrast to “rightly dividing” the Word, there are other teachings that are nothing but “profane and vain babblings.” The word “profane” means “crossing a threshold into wickedness” and “vain babblings” means “empty or fruitless teaching.” How can we recognize this kind of false teaching? First, it allows “ungodliness” to increase. Second, it eats (“gnaws”) like a “canker” (“gangrene”) – in other words, it consumes godliness and eventually infects the whole church if it is not removed! LIFESTYLE is a primary indicator of false doctrine – if it leads people further from a biblical lifestyle, it is FALSE TEACHING!

Paul names two of these false teachers (Hymenaeus and Philetus) who had walked away from truth. Their specific error was to deny a physical resurrection in the future, and they had overthrown the faith of some. But regardless, the Word (“the foundation of God”) stands sure, and the Lord knows who is truly serving Him. The sign that we are true Christians is that we DEPART FROM INIQUITY – because a godly lifestyle on the outside is the litmus test showing God is working on the inside!

2 Timothy 2:20-21 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work.

VESSEL. The “great house” is the CHURCH and it is built on the “sure foundation” (2:19) of God’s WORD. Ultimately, no person and no false teaching can destroy the church – but they can certainly affect us! While the global church cannot be destroyed, the local church can be damaged and its progress hindered by the “vessels” (individual members) that are in it. Some are vessels of DISTINCTION (“honour”) and some are vessels of DISGRACE (“dishonour”) – in other words, God can use some vessels GREATLY and other vessels only SLIGHTLY. Why? Because they have PREPARED themselves for His use. The important emphasis here is that HONOURABLE vessels must not be contaminated by DISHONOURABLE vessels – they must be “purged” (“cleansed”), “sanctified” (“set apart”), and “prepared” (“made ready”). As leaders, we need to be THERMOSTATS (adjusting the spiritual temperature in the church), not THERMOMETERS (reading the temperature of others and adjusting ourselves to match). LEADERS ARE INFLUENCERS!

2 Timothy 2:22 Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

One of the important ways we must “purge” our vessel is to flee from the lusts of the flesh. God has only one instruction for sexual temptation and that is “RUN!” Paul is always concerned for Timothy in this area because of his youth. Instead of following the cues of the world, we are to “follow” the cues of the Holy Spirit, which will lead us to have a “pure heart.” **Flee sin, but follow righteousness** ... and be sure to do it “with them” (other believers) who are going the same direction. True Bible separation is BALANCED – it leads you to separate from the world, but not to separate from other believers in your church. That isn’t separation; it’s isolation!

2 Timothy 2:23-26 But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

SERVANT. Biblical leaders are servants first and leaders second. And that means that they don’t get to decide what assignments they receive! Timothy might be tempted to “strive” with these false teachers, but that would not solve the problem – it would only create more confusion.

Someone once said, "You can try to give a pig a bath, but you'll get dirty, and you'll annoy the pig!" ☺ Leaders don't get into the pignen of the false teachers to argue with them – that's a waste of time. The cure for false doctrine isn't debate – the cure for false doctrine is to teach true doctrine!

The word "servant" in the New Testament commonly comes from the Greek word "doulos" which means "slave." A slave has no will of his own, but is totally under the command of his master. Like the servant in the Old Testament (Exodus 21:5), we say "I love my Master ... I will not go out free!" On our own, we might be tempted to "fight back" against our opposition, but it is important to realize that we are not fighting PEOPLE!

Ephesians 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

SERVANTS MUST NOT STRIVE! Instead, we are to be "gentle unto all men" and "patient" with the people we are leading. We must be "apt to teach" – which simply means that our LIVES must be "instructive." And the reason we approach others in "meekness" (meekness is not weakness, but strength under control) is that we remember that we were once just like them!

It's frustrating, but sometimes leaders must patiently instruct "those that oppose themselves" – for these people (even Christians!) their own beliefs and behaviors are their problem, but they cannot see it! But if we let GOD do the work instead of trying to force the issue, PERHAPS ("peradventure") they will repent ("a change of attitude leading to a change in action") and finally acknowledge the truth. Satan hates repentance, because a change of mind is a powerful force!

The word "recover" (2:26) describes a man coming out of a drunken stupor. Satan makes people drunk with his lies, and the servant of God is to sober them up and rescue them! They have been taken captive, but we are to set them free! And this is certainly no easy task – it cannot be accomplished through "fighting" in the flesh, only through God's power.

It's the "PERADVENTURE" (2:25) that is so frustrating in leadership, but don't let it get to you. We never know the results when we work with people – but God has called us to work with people anyway! In His kingdom, leaders are not BOSSES ... leaders are SERVANTS!

The following is sometimes called "The Paradoxical Commandments." Originally written by Kent Keith in 1968, they were adapted by Mother Teresa and found on the wall of her home for children in Calcutta ...

People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered.

Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives.

Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies.

Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you.

Be honest and sincere anyway.

What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight.

Create anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous.

Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, will often be forgotten.

Do good anyway.

Give the best you have, and it will never be enough.

Give your best anyway.

In the final analysis, it is between you and God.

It was never between you and them anyway.