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Be an Example

By Bryan Hodge

“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.” (1 Timothy 4:12)

Paul lived his life as a Christian role model for others. He told the brethren at Corinth “imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). He told the brethren at Philippi, “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern” (Philippians 3:17). He told the brethren at Thessalonica, “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you” (2 Thessalonians 3:7).

Likewise, he wanted Timothy to set forth a positive example of Christian living. He wanted Timothy not only to proclaim the truth in preaching, but also to show the brethren how to live in practice.

Be an example...

1. In word

A typical person speaks 150,000 words per week (Colley and Webster, Get Real, pg. 8). How do we use our words? (1) Are our words pure? We are not to use “filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting” (Ephesians 5:3-4). We are told to put “filthy language out of your mouth” (Colossians 3:8). (2) Are our words in the proper tone? “A soft answer turns away wrath, but harsh words stir up anger” (Proverbs 15:1). (3) Do our words edify? We are told, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may import grace to the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29). (4) Are our words accurate and in harmony with the scriptures? We are to speak “sound speech that cannot be condemned” (Titus 2:8).

2. In conduct

Can people see that we seek to live according to the scriptures? We are told, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16 cf. 1 Peter 2:12). It has been said, “He is a poor preacher who cannot preach a better message than he practices. But, he is a poorer preacher who does not strive hard to live up to what he preaches.” Do we put our faith into practice? James wrote, “I will show you my faith by my works” (James 2:18).

3. In love

Can people see true Biblical love in us? Jesus said, “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Love should be expressed in words (2 John 1; 3 John 1). It especially needs to be expressed in deeds (John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:16-18). “Let us not love in word or in tongue (only – B.H.), but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

4. In spirit

Attitude is so important. Zig Ziglar once said, “Hardening of the attitudes is the most deadly disease on the face of the earth” (Colley and Webster, Get Real, pl 63). (1) Do we have an attitude or spirit of power (courage, optimism,

an 'I Can' attitude), love, and sound mind (mental discipline, problem solving)? (2 Timothy 1:7). (2) Do we have an attitude or spirit of zeal and energy? (Romans 12:11). (3) Do we have an evangelistic attitude or spirit? Paul wrote, "We have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, 'I believed, and therefore I spoke,' we also believe and therefore speak" (2 Corinthians 4:13; Psalm 116:10).

5. In faith

Let us remember, "Faith without works is death (James 2:20, 26). True faith follows God and does what He says even when doing such is difficult (cf. Hebrews 11). Can people see the commitment in us? Do we remain faithful even when it is not easy? Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Luke 9:23-24).

6. In purity

The term is being used of sexual purity (1 Timothy 4:12 cf. 5:1-2). We are told, "flee fornication" (1 Corinthians 6:18) and "flee youthful lusts" (2 Timothy 2:22). Consider the words of Job – "I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman? For what is the allotment of God above, and the inheritance of the Almighty from on high? Is it not destruction for the wicked and disaster for the workers of iniquity? Does He not see my ways and count my steps?" (Job 31:1-4).

Let us choose to be an example "in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works" (Titus 2:7)!