

Christian living (1 Tim.)

Part 1

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[00:00:01] This afternoon we were on the mountaintop. With some difficulty and reluctance I bring you down to the valley, to the workaday, ordinary experiences of life.

But the wonderful part of God's Word, the Scripture, is that he shows himself to be the God of the plains as well as the God of the hills. And the wonderful thing is that the one of whom we were speaking this afternoon, of whom our brother spoke this afternoon, is the one who was the lowly Jesus because that wonderful picture vividly drawn of the transfiguration finishes up with the fact that they saw Jesus [00:01:09] only. The one they were accompanying with, the one for whom they had left all to follow him, to take up the cross and to follow.

Good as it may be, unnecessary and invigorating for the Christian every day to remember that we serve a glorious Lord who even now is in heaven by right and in heaven by right for his people whom he has bought with his blood, representing us there before God.

[00:02:03] It's how encouraging it may be when we feel that we've really got a hard path to tread.

Encouraging to find that this same Scripture doesn't just speak of events that are to come, of flashes that have occurred, of miracles that have happened, but give us the day-by-day formula for living.

The older brethren, that's older than me, I mean, used to speak of the danger of high talk and low walk.

It's wonderful to look up and so we should. [00:03:04] And as the day approaches and that day star dawns in our hearts and all our hopes and all our ambitions and all our wealth is there, wonderful I say, to come back to what we might call the pathway guide.

And Paul, who probably was used by the Holy Spirit of God to reveal the highest truth in connection with the church, he wrote letters of practical value, the kind of letter but on a grander scale that my father used to write to me when I was a young man away from home. [00:04:01] Letters that made me feel this, he's been through this before.

He knows the way and he's trying to put my feet on a path that will steer me in life to those objectives which will be pleasing to God.

So Paul writes to Timothy.

Now Timothy, let's say it quite simply, seemed to be a favourite of Paul.

Ah, you may say a man like that shouldn't have a favourite. It wasn't Paul's favouring someone who didn't deserve it. It was Paul's assessment of the potential of this young man. [00:05:06] He writes to someone else and says, I've got nobody like him. That wasn't bias because Paul was the kind of man who said some very hard things. I was struck a year or two ago when it was pointed out up in the North Country in a Bible reading that some people get a notion that to be godly one should never say anything detrimental to one's brother or one's neighbour. And the rejoinder was then Paul didn't qualify on that basis.

He had some things hard to be said and they cost him a lot to say them. As he spoke in truth and as he spoke the words of God which are written for us to read, he [00:06:08] was a man who fearlessly stood for that which was right but he had this secret. He had the same compassions though in lower degree as it always moved the Lord Jesus Christ. By the Lord himself.

He spoke outwardly against the Pharisees and the Sadducees. He said of Herod, tell that fox, you'd say those aren't Christian words, no they're Christ's words. They were honest.

They were startling and sometimes it's necessary for us to take the corrective word.

[00:07:07] And where do we find it? We find it in the scripture and surely we may find it in a personal letter written by Paul the Apostle to the man that he left at Ephesus. Ephesus.

That was the place that had appreciated perhaps as no other assembly the heights of Christian privilege.

That was the assembly to which the Apostle Paul addressed that wonderful epistle which has been written so long and read so often to the encouragement of believers all the time since then because it puts us in such wonderful closeness and shows us something [00:08:09] of God's heart, God's power, God's purpose, God's will for us as it brings forward our own responsibilities.

Because the epistles of the Ephesians written to folk of that calibre contains words which are very cutting, let him that stole steal no more.

You don't expect to find it mixed like this, do you? But it's there for the looking for. Now Timothy had been left at Ephesus and Paul wrote to him the kind of letter that any young man who's out in Christian service might well have been pleased to receive from an old and [00:09:05] unseasoned and God-blessed brother to put him in reminder at least or to teach him indeed the kind of conduct that was necessary. So it's a matter of conduct. I read those first few verses of the first chapter because of this. But it speaks in verse 5 after the greeting which doesn't fall into the pattern of my thinking tonight, it speaks of a commandment. Now the end of the commandment is love.

The end of Moses' commandment was far from that.

This do and thou shalt live and it was far from love.

[00:10:05] It was that which was absolute in its demand.

God asked for correct behaviour and the only person who ever produced it was our blessed Lord himself who fulfilled the whole of the law and thereby he relieved us of its impact.

The grace of God that took us out of the realm where that law operated which was a law that proved to be unto death. There's a commandment, speak of it briefly, the fulfilling of it, the end, the completion, the perfection of the commandment of the New Testament, it ends in love.

[00:11:08] Love towards God.

The love of God's people, something that ought to saturate your and my lives and the secret, it is communion with Christ himself and the knowledge of his great love for me and the understanding step by step as I prove my deficiencies in my conduct that God has moved towards me in a love that is so supreme it holds the answer to my every need and the person through whom God moves is the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

[00:12:09] We'll speak more of the commandment that is of love after. Now coming down to, I say down quite sincerely to chapter six.

It starts with the employer-employee relationship. I'm sure you've heard just too much about that in recent months and years but Paul found time and space and the authority of the Holy Spirit of God to pen a few lines upon the relationship of a servant to his master and also of the master to the servant.

[00:13:04] And the end of the commandment is what? It's love.

How can I love my master in an earthly sense? Oh, there could be drawn up quite simply the life history, the case histories of God's people who have served an earthly master who's been unworthy of the name and served him to such completeness because of the motive of love.

And this is what the Holy Spirit through the pen of Paul in this letter written so long ago would teach you and me tonight.

[00:14:02] To stand on one's rights, to abuse the privilege as shown here, to be out of keeping.

And if you want the example, the great servant who bonded himself for you, for me, the one who said as the Old Testament would teach us clearly, I love my master.

There it is.

I love my wife.

I love my children. I will not go out free.

The devotion of love, the extent of it, and shall we not remind ourselves of the enormous inconvenience to the person who ever makes a pledge like that to become a servant forever.

[00:15:11] The world may deride it, but here God commends it.

And then in saying quite quickly to the servant, if you're a servant, then serve.

Serve your master.

To Timothy, you have a service, teach.

Teach these things. Don't just hint at them, press them. They need to be pressed. They need to become the drill of Christian practice, that the servant serves his master.

[00:16:01] Of course we have a wonderful master to serve, but some of us have earthly masters. They may cheat, they may be inconsiderate, they may be rogues and robbers, but if you are in that relationship of service, you can turn the table on them by obeying this commandment which ends and goes no further than pure love.

And if we haven't really tried it, isn't it time we did? Because it says in verse 3, if any man teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, [00:17:01] he is proud, and pride is one of the fruits of sinfulness.

He knows nothing.

Perhaps we needn't go through that great list, but if you do at your leisure, you'll find that it includes some of the things that are at work in high places today.

Envy, strife, perverse disputings, men of corrupt mind, destitute of the truth, men who will purge themselves.

But they put on top of this a mantle of decency because it says in verse 5, supposing that [00:18:04] gain is godliness.

It's easy to put on a Sunday suit and look sanctified, but God doesn't look on the outward appearance.

He looks on the heart.

On the other hand, let me be careful, the outward appearance of a person is the badge by which they show themselves to their fellow man. Don't tell me that the man who fails to keep himself clean and neat and tidy has got a neat and tidy soul because he hasn't.

[00:19:04] We ought to be careful, ought we not, how we dress and how our manners are in front of this world because we're children of the living God and there's a dignity attached to that, a dignity which he expects us to maintain. Ah, you may say, but our Lord moved about as a peasant. Yeah, but he wore a garment that was so exquisite when those who were tearing his clothes to pieces, they didn't do it.

It was something probably they'd never seen before. He was well-dressed to the point, well, they did gamble whose it should be. [00:20:01] But the outward appearance is, let's mark it carefully, is the display of the kind of person we would like people to think we are unless we're marching through this world in disguise. Now here's a danger, here's a danger.

People will take you at your outward rating until they get to know you. In the city in which I live, we have often said, if on a Lord's Day morning you pass a person on the road, clean and neatly dressed and walking briskly along on a Lord's Day [00:21:02] morning at 10 o'clock, he's going to church because that's the only kind of person who bothers to do it.

You know where he's going and the world looks and they expect you at a certain time, at a certain place and so we should be careful, should we not, and give some thought to the image that we show to this world.

This means that there was a commandment, it ends not in death, it's fulfilment is in love.

We're told in verse 3 to, sorry in verse 1, to count our masters worthy, to get the proper [00:22:01] proportion of who we are and why we serve them and how we serve them and in verse 3 it is spoken of, of consenting to this doctrine.

To rebel against it immediately puts us into the class that is spoken of in verses 4 and 5 but come to verse 6, godliness with contentment is great gain.

The Lord spoke of this when he said, a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things that he possesses.

This might well have been written for 1974 for the Western world.

[00:23:02] Men call it the rat race, well they can call it what they may but the Christian has got some counsel here and that is to be content and it says in verse 8, having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

This is a mark of a man who lives by faith and even David could say that in his long experience and David's a man you could trust because he was one who'd walked with kings and he'd walked with shepherds. He'd been through every grade of society and he said in my long experience I've never seen a righteous man forsaken or his seed begging bread.

[00:24:06] God has his own way of maintaining the person who is satisfied with God's pattern for his life but here comes in not only contentment, that could be lack of ambition couldn't it, but with godliness, godliness with content is great gain. And those two ingredients of the Christian's life are wonderful secrets that should compel every one of us to look at ourselves and wonder if one is missing or if both are missing or if we've got the mixture wrong because it's godliness first.

[00:25:07] And godliness, though there may be many simple explanations for it, some say it's godlikeness.

Well through the grace of God, through the practice of the scripture that is so clearly etched in the New Testament, there is that which should enable the simple person as well as a very highly educated sensitive person to find their true place before God, but godliness.

Is it not a closeness to God, not just an outward resemblance, not just being able to [00:26:01] throw out the appropriate verse to meet the situation and dispelling all answer. This isn't godliness, God is a God of righteousness and compassion but more of that in a moment. In verses 9 and 10 there is a

warning that they that will be rich fall into temptations and a snare and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in perdition for the love of money is a root of every kind of evil. Doesn't say it's a root of all evil, it's a root of every kind of evil I believe is a much better rendering and I'm not sure whether my eyes are jaundiced but as I look round the world at large, my world is a fairly global one being an export man, this seems [00:27:05] to be the whole idea of making more and more money, not earning it, making it and it is taken by force and by guile and this is the very opposite from godliness and contentment and there is a built-in warning that if we depart from this basis of godliness with contentment and you've got everything, said a man to me who is not a believer, only six months ago in my office, if you've got faith, you've got everything in a world like this, turning [00:28:02] away said I haven't got it and I failed to put my Bible in front of him effectively enough to convince him that there is a way that would deliver him out of all his troubles. He knows but he doesn't like the recipe because the love of money, it throws up every kind of evil. It's not evil in itself.

When the Lord spoke of the farmer who was rich, whose fields brought forth bountifully and he called him a fool, he didn't call him a fool because he was a farmer, he didn't call him a fool because he was a good farmer, he didn't call him a fool because he was a rich farmer, he called him a fool because he'd put his trust in his riches and had no [00:29:06] time for God and God said tonight is the day of accounting, tonight thy soul required of thee.

It's a very serious thought and let's just take the opportunity, might be here there's someone who doesn't know Jesus Christ as a saviour.

Well let's commend our saviour to you.

He is the one who can make you so rich that he can loosen your grasp on the things of this world that look so glittering.

[00:30:02] You've heard of the child who picked up a very sharp knife and someone made a grab to rescue the knife but it was a mother who swept that hand aside and held in front of the child a beautiful orange and the child dropped the knife and took the orange. There's something better that'll fill you both hands if only you could see in the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal lover of your soul and on the authority of God's word I'm allowed to say that Christ died for the ungodly.

He said not for folk like me, yes.

We all came under that category else we wouldn't be here tonight. [00:31:01] We commend our saviour to you. But let's go on because now we come to something perhaps a little more positive.

Verse 11, but thou, who was that, that was Timothy, but thou, oh man of God, if you're a sister here don't lose heart because this word man is not discriminant between men and women.

It's mankind, isn't it? It's the race of man. Here he's speaking to Timothy alone but you're justified in reading this as the one who's God's man, thou man of God.

And early in my Christian life, if I dare tell you, I was baptised on the Saturday that [00:32:03] followed Good Friday exactly 50 years ago at the tender age of 13, one of the happy days of my life.

But before I got myself dried, there was an old brother who was noted for his gruffness. He was a

farmer and he had a fist as big as a Yorkshire ham. He got hold of my hair, I did have some then, almost lifted me off the floor, I wasn't so heavy as I am now, and said, boy, I want you to be a man of God.

Equally gruffly said to me, shaking me like a dog, do you know what a man of God is? I gave the answer in the negative, I've never forgotten his answer, a man of God is a man [00:33:05] who stands for God in an evil day.

I haven't been completely successful but 50 years later, I think his prayer for me has had an effect upon my life, certainly his words, a man who stands for God in an evil day. And Paul says, Timothy, thou man of God, away with these things, put your back on them and follow after, following, following on.

Now you and I are very fortunate insofar as following after is very much more simple for [00:34:01] us than it was for these early Christians. You think of the folk at Ephesus, they'd been brought up in a town which was soaked in idolatry, and if you go back into Acts, you'll find that when the gospel hit that town, it had such a profound effect that the men of knowledge, the astrologers, the magicians, the witches, and these are things that are hitting us today in this country, they turn to God. Those were the men that composed the assembly at Ephesus who received such glorious truth and they burnt publicly their books. If you go back you'll find it was a vast library and very, very valuable and they burnt them. [00:35:02] So you haven't started on a basis quite like that. There have been sisters, there have been brothers, there still are, thank God, who have walked the path of faith and your instruction is to follow after, to follow after. How do I do it?

I think it's just 30 years ago, since as a Red Cross worker during the war, I found myself for a few days in Cairo and like any young man, decided to see the sites and went out to see Cheops Pyramid and it was a blinding sunshiny day when we clambered up those steep [00:36:04] steps into the hole that's been driven in the side and an Arab guide pushed us into the dark. Was told that at one time it was lit by electric light and all that had gone because it was wartime conditions, don't know what it's like now but it was as black as black could be. I particularly at a disadvantage because I have perhaps the worst accommodation to light and darkness and adjustment that can be and so coming out of the blinding sunlight into intense darkness without a glimmer, completely bewildered. But each time I moved I found that I was hitting a very strong stone wall. The guide said, I won't keep you long on this, the guide said, now there are about [00:37:02] 20 of us in this party, I'm in the front, you're all in single file, I want you to put your left hand forward and your right hand back until you grasp the hand in front of you but you must hold the hand behind you as well and you step forward step by step.

You cannot see where you're going, there is no light, none of the steps are the same height, some of them are sloping and worn and if you get too near the side you'll find there's a ramp and you'll slide down it. So you keep hold of the man in front of you but your duty is to hold the man behind you and don't break the chain. And then as we went along, counting one, two, three, there came a point where he said now [00:38:06] at this point the roof comes so low that you'll have to get down into a crouching position. I think it was somewhere about two foot nine or three feet was it. And so in the darkness in the irregular upward pathway we were following after and very glad to have a hand, an unknown hand, never seen that man before and to hold tight to the man behind to keep the change. We followed after.

But if you just lifted your head for a moment as I did, I raised an egg on my head. It was cold hard

stone that had been there for a long time. I won't go on with the story but to follow after is a matter of fellowship, isn't it, in the Lord Jesus Christ and when you find a godly man, don't just follow him but listen [00:39:08] to the instructions as we did that were coming from above and the instruction here is to follow after.

Now to follow after, it isn't just the model of the pattern of the Lord Jesus Christ. In another place Paul says, be ye followers of me as I am of Christ. But here he says to young Timothy, follow after and he names six objectives.

Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. But when you've read that list, you have a profile, even if in cameo, of the Lord himself, [00:40:04] the righteous one, the godly man, the faithful, the one who was a very epitome of love itself in this world, the patient one who endured.

That's the true meaning of patience here and meekness.

But there's a practical aspect, isn't there? Paul didn't write just to his one young man Timothy, he wrote to Titus. I'll read you a verse from Titus because I think it helps us so much. Titus chapter 2, verse 11, for the grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men has [00:41:03] appeared teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. And I never read that verse without hearing the voice of my great earthly teacher, the late W.J. Beattie, saying, man, if you're going to live soberly, that's to do with your own character.

You live in a sober manner.

To live righteously is to live on correct relationships with your neighbour, your customer, your employer and your neighbour, everybody else. It is to do with the community. To live soberly is your own character. [00:42:03] To live righteously is how you behave yourself socially and the world takes note of it. And to live godly, oh, to be at home in God's presence, oh, to feel at ease before him.

How's it got? Well, it's righteousness here primarily in Timothy and that is to make sure that though I don't steal, it is not just because the Bible says thou shalt not steal, it is because I know to do so would be the greatest affront to the God who loves me and the Lord who died [00:43:02] to save me.

Prophetically, he says, then, when he died, speaking of his death, then I restored that which I took not away.

And if there is one way of admitting guilt, it is paying back what's owing, isn't it? I remember a case in the office where there was some money missing and three of us had access to the safe and the auditor, high ranker, he said, well, this money's missing, it must be somewhere, you know. The auditor said, well, not I, but one of the young men there said, well, I'm prepared to pay one third of what's missing.

The auditor said, well, that's one step towards it. [00:44:01] Turning to me, he said, what about you? I said, I will not pay anything towards this because I haven't had it. And if I pay a third, I'm compromising myself.

And he dropped his eyes and said, I believe you're right. The company will write it off. It's a risk we must take. It's a bona fide mistake somewhere, but there's no way of admitting that one has some

responsibility but by paying it back and the Lord said, I restored that which I took not away and thereby identified himself with my guilt.

He took my debt as though it were his own and paid the full, full price.

[00:45:03] An act of righteousness is not to just meet the law.

It is because the Christian should know that this would put him out of communion with his God. And if you want to know if you're out of communion with God, just go into your own chamber and get down on your knees and you'll find you can't pray effectively when there's something on your conscience.

And to keep a clear conscience before God means following after righteousness. And if it means the going back to the person I defrauded wittingly or unwittingly and putting it right, this is following after righteousness. [00:46:03] Perhaps there's a lot more to it than that, but godliness. This is when my life slants always towards God's will, that he has the first pull as a flower turns to the sun, as a tree bends in the prevailing wind. This is godliness when my life leans towards my God and all that is God-like.

And faith.

It would be possible to speak for a long time on that, but to follow after faith means to live like that.

Paul said, I live by faith of the son of God.

[00:47:04] And there are some men, if they were as honest as Paul was, would have to say, I live by cheating.

I live by fraud.

I live by chance. There are many ways of living one's life, but thou, oh man of God, whoever you are, however young or old you are, here's the indicator, says Paul, follow after faith. And faith is something that when you embark on it, you can't see the end. But you know the person who's above it all and if you walk by faith, the end is secure and the means is fully in his care.

[00:48:04] Follow after love, true love, love that covers a multitude of sins, love that extends to the person I don't like.

This is a challenge because God didn't like you, he loved you dearly.

And he gave his best, his only son, that's love, real loving action. Follow after that. And patience or endurance.

How many of us, as young men, have said from this day onwards, I'm going to read ten chapters a day and get up at five o'clock in the morning the first morning and do it. And at the end of a week, it seems impossible, doesn't it? That isn't endurance. This is the determination to go on and on and on in the seeking of love and faith and [00:49:09] God-likeness and righteousness.

And coupled with this, are you going to say the person who does this kind of thing is going to find

themselves so lifted above everyone else that they're going to become a little bit stiff and starchy.

They're going to be the type of person who speaks in scriptural language when it isn't appropriate and they're going to be the type of person who becomes unsufferable. Oh no, no, no.

Meekness, meekness.

Not pushing one's own wish, standing for that which challenges the Lord's honour and authority. But in meekness, and the Lord rewards that, he was the one who practiced it in this world. [00:50:08] What? Can we walk in six different directions at the same time and follow after? Oh no, no.

As I see it, this is a coordinated exercise of continuance.

And coordination is one of the things that comes with increasing intelligence. If you're a parent, you've seen coordination build up in your child as he adds this to this to this until he's now able to walk as well as to hold as well as to speak at the same time.

These things go on in a pattern but you've got to follow after it and coordination of Christian living is one of the great and wonderful exercises and it is a mark of the man of God.

[00:51:14] Finally, on this man, Paul in verse 13 says, I give thee a charge.

I'm binding something on you, Timothy, in the sight of God that thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which in his times, or perhaps it should say which in its own time, shall show the King of those that reign and the Lord of those that exercise lordship. The one who only has immortality, dwelling in light unapproachable, whom no man has seen [00:52:03] nor is able to see, to whom the honor and eternal might. I'm very deeply grateful to our brother this afternoon who has said, in language that I can't imitate, something of the glory of the person to whom our allegiance has been directed and the glory of a coming day when he will come into his own.

He will.

This is not his day.

People say Christ had his day, he hasn't. The day of the Lord is still future and when that son of righteousness rises, it will show that the end of this commandment is love and joy and peace, the ingredients that this [00:53:07] world talks about but has no means or currency to purchase it.

Come down to verse 20, oh Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust. Now you must find out for yourself what is committed to you.

I don't go into this first. I think it's one of those personal heart-searching things but Timothy was a man of faith, integrity and ability and gift given by God and in some small diminutive way, perhaps it may [00:54:03] be said that everyone has something given, committed to his trust.

You're a steward then, oh Timothy.

If this is on deposit, keep it, hold it and avoid the profane babblings.

There's a lot of it in the world today. There are a lot of those who would ridicule the scripture, there are a lot of those who would say there is no power in Christianity at the same time they would build up the power of the enemy, Satan himself, publicly worshipped, publicly acclaimed and don't be misled. This is not for the man of God. Flee those things but continue, continue in this coordinated exercise of putting into [00:55:03] practical effect those six headings that Paul underlines so clearly in this chapter.

And he also points out that there are some who have gone into these fables, Ephesus was abounded with fables, with witchcraft and there were those at Ephesus that were in danger though they'd had the real highest truth taught and written to them of slipping back to give an ear to those who had something that tickles a human ear. And he says some who have done this, they've missed the mark as far as faith goes. Well don't miss the mark. What better can I say to you tonight? [00:56:01] In closing, grace be with you.

Amen.