

“BE THOU AN EXAMPLE OF THE BELIEVERS”

The greatest advertisement Christianity has in the world today is the exemplary lives of the followers of Christ. One's influence as a Christian is the most valuable contribution he can make to the cause of Christ. The Lord said to His disciples, "Ye are the light of the world." Again, He said, "Ye are the salt of the earth." These statements were made with reference to their influence. As followers of Christ Christians should realize that they should be an example in Christian living, not only to save themselves, but in order to help save others as well. "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:16).

The title of this lesson is taken from 1 Timothy 4:12. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, his son in the Faith, "...Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." Again, he wrote to another, "In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you" (Titus 2:7,8). He was encouraging these men to live life's above reproach so they would give no critic reason to find fault with their claim to be Christians.

Paul said to be an example in word, that is the language one uses to express himself. Why? Because Jesus says, "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:37). Such a statement should make us realize how important it is to always use language that is becoming a Christian.. "For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it" (1 Pet. 3:10,11). James says, "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain" (James 1:26).

Next, the apostle Paul wrote, "Be thou an example in conversation." The word conversation in this passage means "conduct" or "manner of life". We are told, "Only let your conversation (conduct) be as it becometh the gospel of Christ" (Phil 1:27). This leaves no room for misconduct. Paul also teaches us to present our bodies "a living sacrifice unto God." (Rom. 12:1). Jesus said in the sermon on the mount, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt 7:21). There are going to be a lot of disappointed people in the day of judgment.

Paul told Timothy to be an example in "charity". This word comes from the Greek, which means, "love". Christians must have the right attitude toward other people if they are to go to heaven. Jesus taught His followers in John 13:34,35, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." It was the apostle John who said, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). And Peter said, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently."

Another thing Paul told Timothy was to be an example of the believers "in spirit". The term spirit in this case is the moral disposition and attitude of a person. If an individual is an example of a Christian in spirit, he has a spiritual attitude. He is not carnally minded. He thinks in a spiritual vein. With this attitude he mortifies the deeds of the flesh (Romans 8:13). He does not "walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1).

Also, Timothy was told to be an example "in faith". The writer of Hebrews tells us, "Without faith it is impossible to please him (God)" (Heb. 11:6). If a person is an example in faith, it is detectable. His faith is manifested in his actions. He trusts in God, and believes God does all things well. He is a person who "walks by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).

Finally, he told Timothy to be an example of the believers "in purity". When one obeys the gospel he becomes spiritually clean and is pure in the sight of God (1 Pet. 1:22). A child of God is admonished "to keep thyself pure" (1 Tim. 5:22). James says, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

Every Christian should strive to be an example so he can be the influence for good in the world that God intends for His people to be, and we should never be satisfied with our lives until we are.