

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXAMPLE

"Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity [love], in spirit, in faith, in purity." – 1 Timothy 4:12.

WE REMEMBER that Timothy was an Elder in the Church, though young in years. Therefore, it was appropriate that St. Paul should impress upon his mind that He should be an example of the believers, an example to all the Church; and such instruction is implied in other parts of the Epistle. But note that the Apostle, in our text, does not say: Be thou an example to the believers, but, "Be thou an example of the believers." How different!

Being an example *of* believers means that one should show forth not only to his fellow-workers in the Gospel, but especially to the world, what believers stand for – what they believe, what they teach, how they live. We should see to it that we are setting such an example in *word*, as the Apostle enjoins, in the character of our language when declaring the Message of Truth. We are not to be merely smooth-tongued and unctuous; we are not merely to use kind words; but the kindness and interest manifested should be genuine – from the heart. All of the Lord's people are thus to be examples, striving to show forth the praises of our Master.

St. Paul further urges: "Be thou an example in conversation." This word *conversation* does not refer merely to language, as it is now used: the original meaning of this word is *conduct*. Our conduct relates to our manner, to the way we walk, to the way we act, to our general deportment, and not to our words alone. We are to be an example in our gentleness of demeanor. We should not slam doors, nor be boisterous, nor uncouth, nor thoughtless of others. In every way we are to be gentle and kind and considerate, and not rude.

"LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE"

Those who are begotten to the new nature should strive to be examples to everybody of what Christians ought to be. The kind of work we are engaged in should be honest. It may be secular work, yet it should be done as unto the Lord, carefully, faithfully, not merely as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, as servants of God; "for we serve the Lord Christ." The walk of the Christian should be in charity – love – in sympathy, in benevolence, in kindness of word and conduct. A generally sympathetic spirit should pervade his words and deeds, his entire behavior. The Heavenly Father loved mankind; while they were yet sinners He so loved the race that He gave the choicest Treasure of His heart for man's recovery. And He still loves the world, and is fitting the Church to be the blessers of the world in the future. So any begotten of the Lord's Spirit should have a transforming influence at work in his life – an influence that will manifest itself even to those who are out of the way, those who have not yet been blessed with the Light of God.

Our text also reads: "Be thou an example in spirit." This phrase, "in spirit," is not found in the original, but the thought seems proper enough: we are to show kindness of spirit, of disposition, to all. The spirit that animates us at all times should be the spirit, the mind of the Lord.

We are exhorted to be examples "in faith." The Apostle's exhortation applies to us all. The Christian's faith is also manifested to others in his conduct, his words, his course in life. If he is full of faith, he will not be murmuring against the experiences of life as they come, against the providences of the Lord. The Almighty has accepted us as His children; we should have continual and implicit confidence in Him, and whoever has true faith has this confidence. If any of us lack faith in God we shall not manifest faith to others, nor inspire faith in them.

We are to be examples "in purity." There is a purity that goes with all that pertains to God and to His Word – a loftiness of standard, which is not to be found elsewhere. There are people in heathen lands who live more or less chaste lives, but there is nowhere so high a standard as in the Christian religion. Everything impure is contrary to God. Purity is one of the component elements of Christian character. As the Apostle said on another occasion, we are to be "first *pure*, then peaceable, gentle."

LIVING EPISTLES, KNOWN AND READ

In all these ways each of God's people should be living lessons, living epistles, wherever they go; they should be examples to the world. Whether the world believe what we preach or not, we should manifest these qualities which they cannot but approve and respect. This example will bear fruitage in due time, if not now. Every Elder, like Timothy, should be especially careful of his conduct, his words, his example. The Church has declared by choosing such a one Elder that they believe him to be an example of the fruitage of the grace of God in the heart.

The Apostle's counsel to Timothy: "Let no man despise thy youth," should be looked upon as advice not only to Timothy, but to all Elders of the Church who are young in years, that they so conduct themselves as to be **[R5494 : page 201]** examples of the Flock, that their deportment and ability to "rightly divide the Word of Truth" be such that none will have cause to slight the Message they bring, or to think of them as immature and unfit to lead the Flock of God.

Let every child of God, the younger as well as the older, strive to be an example worthy of imitation – an example of earnest, faithful endeavor to copy the Master in his daily life, a pattern of active zeal in the service of our God. We shall not be able while in the flesh to be examples in the full sense of the ultimate glory and beauty of holiness which will be ours beyond the veil: we cannot expect this in the present life. Our Lord alone was such a Pattern.

The Apostle Paul urged, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1.) St. Paul was a noble example of earnest endeavor to attain the perfect likeness of Christ, and his love, his zeal, his intense earnestness in striving to copy the Master and to accomplish His will should be an inspiration to us all. Let each of the Lord's children, individually, realize his or her personal responsibility. We are as "a city set upon a hill." Let each ask himself the question: Am *I* "an example of the believers"?

=====