

How To Stay Loyal To The Lord

2 Timothy 1:13-18

As we have seen in our initial study, this is Paul's last letter. Paul was writing from Rome most likely from a dungeon; at least a prison that would not have been anything like his first imprisonment under house arrest. He's alone. He's cold. He expects to die, and the loneliness that he experiences, tragically, is the result of those who once stood with him now having forsaken him. They are no longer around. They're not standing with him, and you can sense the pain in his heart as you move through the book. Here we are confronted with two, in particular, that broke his heart, but at the same time another one who was a tremendous blessing and encouragement to him. So in 2 Timothy 1:13 the Bible says, "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains; but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found *me*. The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day—and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me at Ephesus."

Let me give you two Proverbs as we begin tonight. Proverbs 17:17, "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." Proverbs 18:24, "But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." Unfortunately, Paul learned this the hard way discovering that there really are few people in life that you can really count on. There are few people in life that you can trust who will stand with you when you are in a difficult situation. There are few people, to use my analogy, that you can trust guarding your back in the foxhole. The longer I live, the smaller that

list grows. Now, that may be an indictment of me. It may be something wrong with me that the longer I live many I thought I could count on actually they were more like fair-weather friends. They were willing to stand with me when things were going in a particular direction that they were in agreement with, but begin to go in a different direction or begin to have some opposition or begin to have some people who are critical of you, and suddenly you find yourself almost standing alone out there in the desert. I believe this: if you at the end of life can even count on one hand those who will stand with you, you are blessed person. You are a very fortunate individual.

As we look at 2 Timothy, Paul reveals there are not many who are standing with the great apostle at the very end of his life. And amazingly, one of the people he has to challenge in this regard is his young son in the ministry, Timothy. There is a key word that connects all of chapter one together. It is “ashamed.” You see it in verse 8, “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God.” Evidently, he had to encourage Timothy in this regard. Look again in verse 12, that very famous verse, “For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.” And then again in verse 16, “The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain;” Onesiphorus is being put before Timothy as an example, someone he ought to emulate, he ought to follow, he ought to learn from. It’s amazing that he is having to write these words to one whom he almost certainly led to Christ, one that he almost certainly discipled and laid his hands upon when he was called into the ministry. I suspect that though Timothy has not forsaken Paul, he is a bit ambivalent; he’s wavering; he’s on the fence. “Not sure if I want to identify

myself with Paul.” I suspect that that was as painful to Paul as any of the others like Demas or the coppersmith Alexander who had caused him great harm. So what we see Paul challenging Timothy to do is stay loyal to the Lord. You say, “No, he wants him to stay loyal to Paul.” No, Paul knows if Timothy stays loyal to the Lord, he will be loyal to Paul. And so what is it that he challenging Paul to do? We see two major ideas emerging from these verses. In fact, there are two very strong imperatives in the first part. Verse 13, “Hold fast,” and verse 14, “keep by the Holy Spirit.” And so he begins by saying, “Stay glued to sound doctrine by holding and keeping.”

I. Stay glued to sound doctrine

1:13-14

The first thing he says is: “Timothy, if you are going to stay glued to sound doctrine, number one you’ve got to....

1) Follow trusted teachers

1:13

“Hold fast.” Literally, it is the word “have.” It is a present imperative so it’s a word of command. It’s in the present tense so he is saying continually have or hold fast the pattern of what he calls here “sound words.” If you return to 1 Timothy 6, you will discover there the word is translated in 6:3 as “wholesome words.” We get our word “hygiene” from it. So it could be translated “wholesome.” It could be translated “sound,” or it could be translated “healthy.” I like “healthy” the best because it is related to the word hygiene. What he is saying is this: there are some words that will make you sick. There are some words that will spiritually make you sick, but there are some words that will make you strong, make you vibrant, make you sound, whole, and healthy. So Timothy, hold fast that pattern of sound words which you have heard from me.

In 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul makes a remarkable statement. Paul says to the Corinthians, “Imitate me [Sounds rather arrogant, doesn’t it? But read the rest of the verse], Imitate me as I

imitate Christ.” You see, Paul understood well that we all imitate somebody. All of us have heroes. All of us have role models. All of us have people that we emulate, we aspire to be like. I’ll be quick to confess to you that Adrian Rogers is my hero. I love him. I adore him. When he died, I cried like a baby. I miss him desperately. As I think in terms of my own life. If you were to ask me tonight, “Who is it that, as you continue on into your 32nd, 33rd year in ministry, who is it that you aspire to be like?” Well, I aspire very much to be like Adrian Rogers because he was a gracious man, but also a man of great conviction. He was a wonderful pastor, a phenomenal preacher. He always treated everybody when he was with them like they were the most important person in the world. He had this remarkable gift and ability, and I think he had that gift and ability because it was who he was. He really did love people. He really did care about people. He really did want to invest his life in people. So all of us are going to follow somebody, and Paul says, “Follow trusted teachers.” And in this context, follow teachers who teach well. “Hold fast the pattern of sounds words [healthy words], which you have heard from me.” I would encourage you in this church to follow the sound teaching of our pastor and associate pastor who are faithful teachers of the Word. I would also say to you what I was taught when I first enrolled in Bible College and that was this: Good preachers listen to great preachers. Well, I would also say this: Good believers will listen to great preachers, and we live in a day and live in a culture and have technology now where there is absolutely no excuse to listen to good Bible teaching just on Sunday. No, listen everyday of your life. Some of you need to turn off that radio and get rid of this talk radio garbage that’s not worth spit to be honest, and listen to something that is actually edifying, something that actually builds you up, something that will actually make you better and make you more like Jesus. And so the Bible says, “Follow trusted teachers.” But secondly, the Bible says...

2) Be continually focused on Jesus

1:13

It always comes back to Jesus, especially in the context of sound, healthy words. “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” Paul would say the key to sound teaching is staying glued and continually focused on Jesus. Now, he clarifies or qualifies or at least gives insight into the way that we stay connected to Jesus and you see it by the two words “faith” and “love.” I believe first that the object of those two words is Jesus. In other words, how do you stay glued to sound doctrine, following trusted teachers? Well, as you focus on Jesus you trust him. That’s faith. You trust him, and you love him. You trust him, and you love him. If you and I will continue to grow in our faith and love for Jesus, I have no fear we will stay in sound doctrine. We will stay where we need to stand. In fact, when I taught theology for several years at college and seminary, I would tell my students, and I’ll tell you the same thing. Give me ten minutes with you. Let me ask you some basic fundamental questions about what you believe about Jesus, and I can identify between 95-99% of the rest of your theology, because what you think about Jesus will determine what you think about the rest of Bible doctrine and the rest of your Christian life. And so he says, “Faith towards Jesus, love towards Jesus.” I also think he would say, “Love that starts with Jesus does not stay just with Jesus, but rather by loving Jesus, you will rightly love others.” So by having faith and love that are in Christ Jesus you will rightly believe him and trust him. You will rightly love him, and you will rightly love others. As Paul says in Ephesians 4:15, staying glued to Jesus will enable you to, what? Speak the truth, but to speak the truth in love. So we follow trusted teachers. It does matter who you listen to, who you trust. We should be continually focused on Jesus. I’m not going to listen very long and I’m not going to follow very long any teacher that is not driving me back to Jesus. Thirdly, we also need to...

3) Trust the ministry of the Holy Spirit

1:14

He says in verse 14, “that good thing [by the way, that good thing is just another way of describing sound doctrine. In fact, in my notes I have sound doctrine equals that good thing. So, that good thing [which is sound doctrine] which was committed to you, “keep.” Keep is an imperative. It’s a word of command. So, that good thing, that sound doctrine, those good words that were committed to you, you need to keep them. There is a lot of false teaching. There are a lot of people that are very eloquent, very persuasive. They have big ministries. They are on TV. They are on the radio. They have big podcast ministries. We need some help! Well, part of that help comes from trusted teachers. Some of that help comes from a better source than that, and it is the Holy Spirit of God! He says, “keep that good thing committed to you [and how do I do it?] by the Holy Spirit who dwells in you.” In other words, all of us have on the inside of us, if we have truly been born again, a divine teacher who will assist us, and help us, and guide us to stay glued to the truth.

I have a friend that a number of years ago, when our seminaries were more liberal in their theology, who went to school at one of our liberal seminaries. He was not all that well educated. He was not all that well prepared. He had not studied a great deal in terms of biblical and theological and ethical and philosophical studies. But, he remembers getting into a class and when the professor began to question the historicity of Genesis, when he began to question whether or not Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible, when he began to question whether or not the Exodus really happened or was it a myth or at best, something that was greatly embellished. He said, “When those things were raised in the classroom, on the inside it was like there was a warning buzzer that kept going off. I could not explain why, but something on the inside kept telling me, ‘This is wrong. This is wrong. This is wrong. This is wrong.’ And I think I

know what that thing was; He is called the Holy Spirit of God. And when the Holy Spirit hears that which is false and that which is dangerous, I believe if you are sensitive to him, you will sense his warning and you will sense his cry of danger. Furthermore, these two connect. Jesus told us in John 14-16 that the primary goal and ministry of the Holy Spirit is to exalt and glorify him. And so the Holy Spirit is, like, really, really happy when someone is teaching the truth about Jesus, and he is really, really happy when there is teaching that is focusing upon the gospel, focusing on Jesus, talking about his sinless life, talking about his perfect substitutionary atonement, talking about his death, his resurrection, his ascension, the promise of his coming again. The Holy Spirit gets really happy and really excited when those kinds of things are being talked about, because the Holy Spirit loves to honor and glorify and magnify the Lord Jesus. But when the Lord Jesus is not being magnified, glorified, and honored as he ought, I assure you that the Holy Spirit is going to warn you, “Beware, beware, beware, beware.” So the Bible says, “If you are going to stay loyal to the Lord, you’ve got to stay glued to sound doctrine. You’ve got follow trusted teachers. You’ve got to be continually focused upon Jesus, and you must trust the ministry of the Holy Spirit.” But now secondly, and here Paul is so very practical, so very transparent, so very honest. We must...

II. Be honest concerning those you work with

1:15-18

Under verses 15-18 in my outline, I have written both of the words “encouragers” and “discouragers” because if you live long enough and you engage in Christian ministry long enough and you attend church long enough, there are going to be people who will wonderfully, encourage you, and there will also be people who will tragically, sadly discourage you.

In fact, I say this evening with nothing but a broken heart, I don’t have enough fingers and toes to count my friends who are no longer in ministry today because of some moral failure.

In fact, I came out of a church in Forrest Park, GA, and when I did there were one, two, three, four, five, six of us who came out at the same time called into full time ministry. Today two of us are still in the ministry, two out of six. That's one-third. Paul wants to address in particular, not only those who have fallen by the wayside, but those that turned their back on him and, when he had his great hour of need, they were nowhere to be found. You see, he just honestly says in verse 15...

1) Some people you trust will disappoint you

1:15

“This you know...” You ought to mark that phrase because it is also found in verse 18. “This you know that...” Paul appeals to something Timothy knows by his own experience. “This you know that all those.” Most likely he is being hyperbolic because he is going to point out there is at least one, Onesiphorus, who did not forsake him. And of course, Timothy is still standing for him, although he may be wavering. Dr. Luke is still with him. And so, basically, he says “for the most part” everybody else in that area went the other way. So verse 15 again, “This you know that all those in Asia” [Asia equals the ancient province of Asia Minor. It equals today modern day Turkey]. He is not talking about the continent of Asia. He is talking about the province of Asia Minor whose capital was Ephesus which he mentions at the end of verse eighteen. So, think modern day Turkey, think the city of Ephesus as its major city at that particular time. This you know all those in Asia have turned away from me among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.”

He singles them out. Why? Because at one time, they stood with him. At one time, they labored alongside of him. At one time I suspect that Paul had great hope and great aspirations... in fact, Paul perhaps trusted them and put certain responsibilities into their hands and yet, Paul says, “They have defected. They have deserted.” And perhaps even now, they are denying him. Keep in mind that by this time Paul has been arrested. It is almost certain that he has been

charged with a capital crime. Now there are brothers and sisters, because the heat is on, are nowhere to be found. Nero has set fire to Rome in A.D. 64. He has now commenced a campaign against Christians that is very intense in Rome but now spreading out to other areas as well, and the ringleader of the whole thing is a man named Paul. And so at this particular time it's not all that safe to acknowledge that you even know him, much less that you at one time worked with him. So Paul, as best as we can reconstruct, was arrested perhaps in Asia Minor. He was then taken to the imperial city of Rome where he would be tried, and as Paul looked around at the day of his arrest, suddenly all those who had stood with him, well, they are all gone. People he thought would take a bullet for him are nowhere to be found, and I'm telling you, you live long enough, you serve long enough, and you will find that you too will experience that kind of disappointment from those who you thought were your friends that would stick with you no matter what. I'm going to tell, you will sometimes be unbelievably surprised and brokenhearted at those who you thought would take that bullet for you but in actuality are willing to load the gun and put a bullet in you. It is very, very unfortunate.

2) Some people you trust will bless you

1:16-18

And yet, at the same time, there are those who won't stand with you, there are others. You thought they liked you. You thought they believed in you. You thought they were your friend, but you discovered... they really were your friend. They really were in your corner. They really were loyal to you. When it came time for them to stand up and be by your side, they were there just like that. Though Paul had been forsaken by Phygellus and by Hermogenes, there was another one that indeed blessed him. This man's name is Onesiphorus. Verse 16, "The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains." Now, an interpretive issue: as I was reading and preparing for this study, I

discovered that a number of commentators think because he says, “The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus” that Onesiphorus is dead. Perhaps he had even suffered martyrdom because he had taken a stand for Paul. That is certainly possible, but it is also possible that it may be the case that he is asking God to bless the family of Onesiphorus because 1) Onesiphorus has left Asia Minor, left Ephesus, and he has come to Rome to minister and to care for Paul, and 2) as a result of that his family is alone. Dad’s gone. My husband is away. And so he is asking God to bless them and grant them mercy on behalf of the ministry of Onesiphorus to him. I think that’s more likely. Again, dogmatism is not warranted, but Paul does pray that the Lord would be kind to his house. Why? Well, note the following three sub-points. First of all, what will the trusted, blessed kind of friend do for you? At least three things: Number one...

a. They will refresh you

1:16

“The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and he was not ashamed of my chains.” On the negative, no shame, not ashamed to identify himself with Paul, not ashamed to say, “I am Christian. I am a follower of Jesus Christ.” But that phrase “refresh,” what does that mean? I think it means several things. I think it means he refreshed him by finding him. In fact, I didn’t know this until I began studying on this particular issue. In the ancient world, if you were in prison, the only food and the only clothing and the only comforts you might receive were those brought to you by your friends. In other words, many, many, many, many, many prisoners died of starvation in ancient prisons because the prison guards were under no obligation nor were they going to take anytime to provide anything for you. If you did not have friends or family who brought you something to eat, you did not eat. They didn’t bring you a cloak... That’s why he said to Timothy, “When you come, get my cloak.” Why? Because he was cold. Would they give him a blanket? No. No blanket, no clothes, no nothing.

Onesiphorus leaves Ephesus. He takes a boat, travels to Italy, probably never having been there before. He searches out, finds Paul and brings him something to eat, something to wear. He's there with his presence. He's there as a brother in Christ, and Paul says, "He refreshed me. In fact, he refreshed me again and again." Secondly, he pursued him.

b. They will pursue you

1:17

Verse 17: "but when he arrived in Rome [now don't run past this too fast.], he sought me out very zealously and found me." You say, "Well, what does that mean?" It means when he got there, he didn't know where he was. Some have surmised that Paul was in the dreaded Mammertine dungeon. Others have said, "No, he was simply in prison." But it was very common for them to stick a prisoner in prison, and tell nobody. You couldn't find them. So Onesiphorus gets to Rome. Perhaps he has never been there before. It is the largest city in the ancient world, and he begins to look. He begins to hunt, and understand, it is dangerous for him to ask, "Do you know where Paul is?" If he asked the wrong guy, he's in prison with him. It's dangerous for him to look for Paul, because no doubt, Nero had his spies. They were looking for Christians whom they would take and arrest at the drop of a hat. It was dangerous for him to look. He visits, but not only does he visit, the text says, he returned again. He refreshed him often. In other words, he did not just come once. He came again and again. Even though it was dangerous to his life and welfare to do so, he kept on coming back because he was that devoted and committed to Paul. So Paul says, a real friend will refresh you; a real friend will pursue you, and also, a real friend will serve you.

c. They will serve you

1:18

Verse 18, "The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day because you know very well how many ways he ministered to me at Ephesus." In other words, what

Onesiphorus did in verse 17 was just the habit of his life. He had served Paul again and again at Ephesus. He comes to Rome seeking him out while he was in prison, and he does what? Again and again and again and again. In other words, Paul should have known that he was going to show up, and Paul should have known that he would come back again and again and again. Why? That's the kind of brother he was. That's the kind of servant he was. That's the kind of faithful Christian he was. I don't know this for sure, but it's possible that Onesiphorus had been taught by this time the wonderful words of Jesus in Matt 25:34-40. "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give *You* drink? When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You*? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren [like Paul], you did *it* to Me.' So perhaps Onesiphorus recognized in supporting, refreshing, and pursuing Paul, he was also doing the same thing for Jesus.

Conclusion

Recently I wrote an 8,000 word essay for a book called *The Christology of the Pastorals*. What does that mean? It means you basically go through the Pastorals and you ask the question,

“What would I learn about Jesus, his person and his work, if all I had was 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus?” The answer is: you would learn a lot! I worked on it for months, and as I was working on this message I saw something I completely missed. So, I went back and changed it this morning. What did you see?” Look back at verse 16: “The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord on that Day.” He’s talking about the day of eschatological, final judgment. You say, “What’s the big deal?” Okay. Let’s ask a question: “The Lord grant to him...” “Who do you think the first ‘Lord’ is there in verse 18?” I think it’s almost certainly Jesus. So the Lord Jesus grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord... now, who is he talking about there? Almost certainly God the Father. So, “the Lord [Jesus] grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day.” Now, those of you that have gone to seminary or college know that the word for the Lord is the word *kurios*, and he uses the exact same word for both of these persons in verse 18. You say, “What’s the big deal?” The big deal is this: he can call the Son “Lord,” and he calls the Father “Lord.” Or if you like, what he can call the Father, he can call the Son. In other words, if all I had was verse 18, I would know that Paul believes in the deity of the Son, because he can say the same thing about the first Lord, the Son, that he can say about the second Lord, the Father. And so, “The Lord [Jesus, who is God] grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord [that is God the Father] in that Day.” If you think I have misunderstood it, I am happy for you to correct me. I looked at it long and hard, and I just can’t find any other way to get around it than that Paul is very normally, naturally, with no fanfare, ascribing deity not only to the Father by the use of the word *kurios*, he is also ascribing deity to the Son as well.

So C.S. Lewis said: “To love at all is to be vulnerable, so if you don’t want to be hurt give yourself to no one.” I know some people like that. If you don’t want to be hurt then give yourself to no one, because the fact of the matter is to give yourself to anyone is to make yourself

vulnerable. It is to open the door that you may be hurt, but it is also to open the door that you may be loved and served and cared for and greatly, greatly blessed. I think it's worth the risk. I think Paul would say it's worth it too.