

A CALL TO LOYALTY

II Timothy 1:1-18

By David H. Roper

I am certain you are aware of some of the activities of the dissidents at Stanford last year. At the height of the disorder there was a sit-in at the Applied Electronics Laboratory building on campus. John Walkup, Jim Barnum, Milt Pope, and I went into the Lab to talk to students. We discovered that they had made a Red Guard bookstore out of John Walkup's office. When we walked in, we found a number of students in the bookstore. We had an opportunity to look through the literature they had on the tables and to share the gospel with some of them. There was a girl in the room who became quite involved in the discussion. At one point in our conversation she jumped to her feet and shouted, "Don't you realize that one-third of the world's population is starving today?" I said, "Yes, I do realize that, and it grieves me. But, what is more important, it grieves the heart of God. She interrupted me with a stream of profanity, and then she said, "If God loves them, why doesn't he feed them?" and she began to cry. I really did not know what to say. I knew the Lord had something to say. I prayed for an answer. He brought to mind a verse that we studied in our Intern studies the week before, John 6:27, where Jesus said,

"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on this has God the Father set his seal."

They had been quoting out of their little Red Book all afternoon, so I took out my little New Testament and I read those words. It always strikes me with what power and authority the words of Jesus come. I read those words to her and pointed out that God's concern is with the total man. But he places priority on spiritual need and while he is concerned about the physical, the first order of importance to him is the inner man. It is on this that God the Father has set his seal, i.e., the Father endorses this principle. This is his plan. He wants to change people by rebuilding the inner man. I asked her, "Do you have a plan to rebuild lives?" It became very clear after we had talked awhile that she had no plan that none of the students there had a plan. They were there to destroy; not to build. I am not being critical of these young people, because we do love them. They are sensitive, concerned young people. But it is very clear to me that they have no constructive program. I'm glad we have a plan. Of course it's really not our plan; it is God's plan -- the gospel of Jesus is the only program that I know that can rebuild man.

In the four weeks that we have together, I would like to talk about that plan. I want us to study together a book that affirms the absolute needs of declaring and utilizing the plan that God has laid out for us. I would like to have you turn with me to II Timothy. I taught this book last year to a group of students and it struck me that this is such a contemporary book. The events that concerned the Apostle Paul and the recipient of this letter, Timothy, are the same events and circumstances that we face today. It has the message for us today.

This was a letter that the Apostle Paul penned. It bears his signature. He wrote it during his final imprisonment in Rome. During his first imprisonment they allowed him the comparative luxury of a house arrest, but for this second and last imprisonment they confined him in the Mamertine prison in Rome from which, as far as we

know; he escaped only by death. In the last chapter there is a very touching description of the circumstances in which Paul found himself. In verse 9 he writes to Timothy,

"Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica [he dropped out -- perhaps he had a pagan girl friend in Thessalonica]; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you; for he is very useful in serving me. Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus [to take Timothy's place there]. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments."

The Apostle makes three requests that indicate something of his needs at this time. He sent for his cloak; winter was approaching and they confined him in a cold, damp dungeon. He dreaded another winter without a wrap, and he writes to Timothy to bring a cloak when he comes from Ephesus. And then the books, the secular reading matter that the Apostle Paul enjoyed so much. He was bereft of his friends and he had nothing with which to occupy his time. I'm sure you can identify with him if you love books as I do. When I was a boy my parents had a book plate made up for me that I placed in the fronts of all my books. It had a little bookworm eating its way through the cover of a book, with the caption at the bottom, "As for me, give me a book." That is sort of my philosophy of life as well, so I can understand something of Paul's need. But most of all; he says, bring the parchments, the Old Testament scrolls; these copies of scripture that Paul had carried with him through his journeys in Asia Minor, as he had preached the gospel before Jewish and Gentile audiences. They were perhaps filled with notations and cross-references, these familiar copies of the scriptures that he loved so much.

He had an acute physical, emotional, and spiritual need. He was afflicted in body, soul, and spirit. You would think that he would be discouraged. He had invested the greatest part of his life in a ministry in Asia Minor and Europe, and now he is experiencing a reversal. Many people were defecting from the faith. The church was under persecution by Roman government, and the Jewish religious authorities.

It was a grim time for the Apostle, and could have been very discouraging. But throughout the book there is no note of discouragement; rather there is solid encouragement, enthusiasm and excitement about the gospel that has been committed to him, and words of confidence to his young associate, Timothy.

Timothy was a young man that Paul had encountered on his first missionary journey through Asia Minor. He had accompanied the Apostle Paul on his second missionary journey and then was dispatched by the Apostle to Ephesus to shepherd the church there. Timothy evidently had three problems which you can detect as you read between the lines of these two personal letters (first and second Timothy). The first was his youth. Paul writes in I Timothy, "Let no man despise your youth, but set the believers an example . . ." He was awed by the responsibility of ministering to a group much older than he. I think that many of us can identify with that problem. Secondly, he was prone to sickness. He must have been very frail, for Paul refers to his frequent ailments. We all know how discouraging that can be when we are weak in body. Third, he was very timid and shy. It was difficult for him to speak out in the face of the opposition that he was experiencing in the city of Ephesus. It was an enormous responsibility that God had placed into his hands. He was the leader of the only Christian assembly in the city of Ephesus. He was under fire, separated from Paul by hundreds of miles, and I'm sure he was discouraged, not knowing where to turn. But Paul writes those words of encouragement which are directed to us as well, because I sense that we have all felt the same pressures that Timothy experienced.

It is always interesting to read someone else's mail, and this will be our experience in the next four weeks. However, Paul gives us this right, because in the last verse of the book Paul says,

"The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you." (2 Timothy 4:22)

This is the only occurrence in the book where this personal pronoun is in a plural form. The indication is that he wanted Timothy to read this letter to the church in Ephesus, so that it might be an encouragement to them and they in turn might be an encouragement to Timothy. And so we have the right to read this letter because it is written to us as well.

Let us look first at the introduction, verses 1 and 2. Paul begins with his customary introduction:

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus,"

Paul never once repudiated his authority as an apostle. There were many believers, particularly the Jewish believers, who never accepted his authority. They felt he was a bit irregular, and wasn't one of the original twelve. He was constantly under suspicion. But Paul knew that he spoke as a divine spokesman. He had that authority. When he wrote his first letter to the church at Thessalonica, he said,

"And we also thank God constantly for this that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you."

That word likewise applies to this letter. This is not merely a recommendation from the Apostle; it is a divine revelation to which we must give heed. We cannot treat this word lightly. Verse 2,

"To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord."

This "beloved child" is a wonderful term of endearment. Timothy was not, of course, his son in the flesh, but his spiritual son. These are words coming from a rugged old veteran who bore in his own body the marks of his conflict, a conflict from which Timothy was inclined to shrink. Yet Paul does not rebuke him, but encourages and supports him. We'll observe this as we study the book. He closes his introduction with the familiar triad, "Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." Grace is for the worthless; mercy is for the helpless; peace is for the restless.

The first chapter of this book is the first major section of the letter, and I have entitled it, "A Call to Loyalty to The Gospel." The first aspect of that loyalty is found in verses 3 to 5 -- *belief* in the gospel. That is where we must begin. We cannot be loyal to the gospel unless we have first believed it, as Timothy did. Paul writes,

"I thank God whom I serve with a clear conscience, as did my fathers, when I remember you constantly in my prayers. As I remember your tears, I long night and day to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith what dwelt [a word that means literally, to dwell down deep inside] first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells [deep down] in you."

Paul observed in Timothy a sincere faith, an unfaked faith. He was not playing a role. He uses a word that literally means, "he is not one who speaks out from under a mask." It was a word taken up from the theater, where actors would stand behind a mask and play the role associated with the mask. They were called "hypocrites" because they spoke out from under a mask. Paul said, "When I saw you, Timothy, I saw that your faith was real, you were not playing a role." And this kind of genuine faith constitutes the foundation of loyalty that makes possible a continuation of loyalty.

I am certain our tendency to wander away from the truth grows out of the fact that we really do not believe it. We have not wholeheartedly and unreservedly committed ourselves to it. We have strings attached, we have reservations, and therefore it is easy to drift away from it. John speaks of some whom he says "went out from us (i.e., the body of believers, of disciples) , because they were not of us." They were never really committed to the Lord. They did not endure because they could not endure. They had never allowed the Lord Jesus to grasp them firmly. I think we can illustrate this from a human love affair. When you men first asked your wives to marry you, you would have been a bit shocked if she said, "Yes, I love you and I'd like to marry you, but I reserve the right to go out with Charley on Friday nights." You would not like that, because you cannot build any kind of relationship on that basis. You see; the foundation of continuance and loyalty to one another in human relationships grows out of this wholehearted commitment to one another, without reservation. And Paul says, "That is what I see in you, Timothy." That is the mark of one who can continue in the gospel, because the foundation is laid firmly. There is a faith that dwells deep down. And this is the foundation of loyalty, this genuine faith.

Now a word about the expression of that loyalty, found in verses 6 through 14, four ideas based on four imperatives, the first found in verse 6, "rekindle the gift." The second in verse 8, "do not be ashamed, but take your share of suffering." The third, verse 13, "Follow the pattern of the sound words," and the fourth, verse 14, "guard the truth that has been entrusted to you." "Rekindle the gift," i.e., *proclaim* the gospel. "Take your share of suffering," *suffer* for the gospel. "Follow the pattern," *obey* the gospel. "Guard the truth," *defend* the gospel. These, Paul says, are four expressions of that loyalty. The first, "proclaim the gospel," in verses 6 and 7.

"Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control."

Timothy is said to have received a divine endowment, a gift from God that was received through the apostolic hands. Scripture does not tell us specifically what that gift was and therefore we can't dogmatize. According to I Timothy 4 it was a gift that was granted to Timothy at the time of his ordination when he was set apart to the Christian ministry. Some therefore think that the gift is the ministry itself. This is possible, but I am inclined to think what Paul refers to here is the spiritual gift which elsewhere in the scripture is called the gift of *teaching*. As a pastor/teacher he had the responsibility of instructing the body of believers at Ephesus. Paul says, rekindle that gift. Or as J. B. Phillips says, "Keep stirring up that fire that is within you."

We can understand something of Timothy's feelings. There was a wholesale defection from the faith. The champion of faith, the Apostle. Paul, was in prison for declaring that faith. There was intense persecution, and I'm sure that Timothy, being the timid soul that he was, was inclined to shrink from proclaiming the gospel. But Paul says don't shrink from your assignment, keep fanning the fire that is within you. Keep it aglow, keep it alive.

Now the reason for that command is given in verse 7,

"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control."

You see it would be futile to say to a man like Timothy, "Now Timothy, be strong! Just give it everything you have! Stand before those people and teach." Timothy would shrink from that. The thing that made it work was a realization that the Holy Spirit that God had granted to him and who indwelt him was not a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and of a disciplined mind. It would never do to admonish Timothy without the assurance of the power of the indwelling Spirit. His strength lay in another life, a life resident within him, the life

of a mighty Lord. That spirit, he says, is not a spirit of fear but of *power*, i.e., it has the capacity to influence others. Timothy would say, "But I'm weak in personality. I'm not strong. I'm not a leader." Paul would say, "That's all right. It is not your power that will influence others; it's the power of the Holy Spirit." It is a spirit of *love*, i.e., it was not a spirit of self assertion, but a spirit of service to others. It is a spirit of *self-control*, a spirit that does not give way to panic under pressure, or passion. And will you notice the verb tenses in this verse? Paul says that he *did not give* you. That is past tense. It is a present possession. The Holy Spirit was indwelling him, already available to him. And therefore a spirit of fear was absolutely forbidden to him. He had a spirit of power and love and of a sound mind in the indwelling Spirit of Christ. This is the first expression of loyalty. Proclaim the gospel.

Second, suffer for the gospel, verses 8 through 12.

"Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but take your share of suffering for the gospel in the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, and now has manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, and therefore I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me."

Paul says don't be ashamed of our *Lord* to whom you belong, and don't be ashamed of me, because you belong to me, too. The Apostle was in prison, abandoned by his friends because he was a constant embarrassment to them. He stubbornly refused to be quiet even in the face of an imperial edict. He was always sounding off in public. He always embarrassed his friends who were trying to get along with the Roman authorities. They were trying to make the church a bit more respectable, and here was this scruffy, unwashed jailbird who refused to shut his mouth, they were embarrassed by him. What a poignant plea, "Don't be ashamed of me, Timothy." I could not help but think of some Christians I know who embarrass me. They don't have my background, my style of life; they bother me. But we're in the family together. I belong to them, you see, and I must not shut myself off from them, I can't be ashamed of them.

Paul writes, "Don't be ashamed of the Lord or of me, but take your share of suffering for the gospel." Suffering seems to be the normal consequence of believing and proclaiming the gospel. It was the experience of the Apostle Paul, as he tells us in verse 11, and it will be our experience. Why is it that whenever we proclaim the gospel, people will invariably persecute us? It is because there is something inherent in the gospel itself. The message makes men mad. The message is that God saves men by grace and not by merit, that man is inescapably indebted to God. He cannot get away from that obligation. Man can't make it on his own. And man cannot simply stomach his own helplessness. We sing the hymn, "Nothing in my hands I bring, Simply to Thy cross I cling," and that makes people mad, because they want to bring something, anything. But the gospel says we can bring nothing; Jesus Christ has done it all. The scriptures say that if we proclaim man's merit, or some form of humanism, we will escape persecution. But if we believe the gospel and proclaim the fact that man is a sinner, we will suffer for it. It is inevitable. We will be ostracized, we will be excluded from the best circles; we will be hated and opposed. That's the name of the game. Jesus said that would be our lot. That is what he experienced, and how can we expect to experience anything less than that? Peter says, "Don't be surprised at the fiery trial that is to try you, as though some *strange* thing has happened to you." We can expect opposition. Therefore we must not succumb to the temptation to mute the gospel, no matter what the pressures may be. It is the only thing that has the power, ultimately to heal men. We are going to have to proclaim it in the face of hatred and hostility.

In verses 9 through 12 we find a parenthetical section, which supplies the reason why we should not be ashamed of the gospel. It is the same argument Paul uses in Romans 1, when he points out that he is not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God unto salvation to those who believe it. His argument here is, the gospel is the power of God; and therefore we must not be ashamed of it. It is a "power" in the sense that it is the only force that has the capacity to heal lives, and therefore we can be bold in our declaration of it. This section falls basically into three headings: the *character* of the gospel; the *origin* of the gospel; and the *basis* of the gospel.

The *character* of the gospel, or what it is: It is a gospel that has saved us and called us with a holy calling. It is more than forgiveness. I hope we are clear on that. It is a calling to holiness, It involves the total program of God by which he has determined to justify you (i.e.1 to declare you righteous), sanctify you (set you apart to your intended purpose so you can be what God intends you to be) , and to glorify you (i.e., to conform you to the image of Jesus Christ himself). That is the character of the gospel, the total pro gram of God by which he rebuilds a life and makes it again what man was intended to be.

Its origin, Paul says, literally is "before eternal times," or before time began (verse 9) , "the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago." He gave us something before time began. Salvation therefore is not based on our works. It was accomplished before we ever had an opportunity to do any work. It was given before we were born. It was given before time began. That ought to engender humility in us. We have no claim upon God, we have no right to come before him, we have, as John R. W. Stott says, "no innate eligibility. We stand before God stripped of any merit. We are there only by the grace of God.

The final word is the *basis* of the gospel. It rests on the historical work of Christ. That is the unique thing about the Christian faith; it is rooted in time. It occurred in time and space. It was planned in eternity but it was manifested in time. And what did he do? "He abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." There is something very striking about that statement, "he abolished death," because I can see the apostle Paul sitting in his cell awaiting death. But to the Apostle death was only a trivial episode in his life. He was going from one degree of relationship with Jesus Christ to another. The cross had drawn the sting of death. Paul was not concerned because Jesus had abolished death. I think we may also say that Jesus has abolished the living death in which the world finds itself today. Francis Schaeffer in his book, "Death Of The City," refers to the fact that people have given up the ghost in the city. They have nothing to live for, no purpose, God is not at home in the world, life is meaningless and absurd. But Jesus Christ has abolished that death.

Now that is our salvation, what Hebrews calls "so great a salvation." Its purpose: man's transformation into the image of God. Its origin: God's eternal plan. Its basis: Jesus' historical appearance to abolish death, And that is why Paul says the gospel is powerful. And that is why we must not be ashamed of it or apologize for it. We are to proclaim it and, if necessary, to suffer for it.

And then we are to obey it. In verse 13, Paul says,

"Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."

Follow the pattern of healthy words, of whole words. Be a whole man. Let your life be a model of the gospel you believe and proclaim. This is an inherent part of our message. People will look at us. They must see the truth incarnate in our lives. This is where our authority lies. As Jesus said to men who were opposing him, "If I do not the things that I tell you, then do not believe me." Part of our proclamation is the truth embodied in our life. People are justifiably resentful at being told that we have the solution to life, when we are exhibiting all the

problems of life. Our obedience will be demonstrated by *faith* and in *love`* the kind of love that was in Christ Jesus, the kind of love that transcends human love, the kind of love that characterized our Lord himself, who always had time for people, who was never in a hurry, who was always sensitive to the needs of others, who poured out his life in ministry to them. If we are going to be loyal to the gospel of Jesus Christ, it must issue in a personal obedience to the gospel in our lives.

Finally, verse 14, we must guard the gospel.

"Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within you."

This is a military term. It means, to place a garrison about, to defend stoutly against loss or damage. We can see something of the circumstances behind this statement. Paul is nearing the end of his life. The twelve Apostles at this time either are dead or scattered throughout the Roman empire. The infant church is surrounded by evil forces. People are defecting from the faith. Paul is concerned about the condition of the church after his hand is removed. It is in this setting that Paul appeals to Timothy to guard the truth, defend the body of doctrine that was delivered by the Apostles. Of course, the application today is so obvious, with all of the theological confusion, the growth and proliferation of cults, the attacks on the scripture, the desire on the part of men in high places to lay aside the word of God and to depend upon the mind of men. How important it is therefore to defend the truth, against all attacks, to hold diligently to the gospel handed down by the Apostles and delineated in the Scriptures.

Just a final word. This last paragraph, verses 15 through 18, is a touching illustration of loyalty. There is much we could learn from the life of Onesiphorus.

"You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, and among them Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me; he was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me eagerly and found me -- may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day -- and you will know all the service he rendered at Ephesus."

What a touching tribute to this faithful man. There is every indication that Onesiphorus lost his life to Rome serving Paul. He was willing to lay aside his own life to minister to the needs of this Apostle. I wish we had more time to look at Onesiphorus, for he is a wonderful illustration of that loyalty to the gospel of which Paul speaks.

This is Paul's call to loyalty. The foundation of loyalty -- believe it; the expression of loyalty--proclaim it, suffer for it, obey it, and defend it. I suspect this is more than we can handle. I know it is more than I can handle. But you see I left out the one verse that makes it all possible. It is verse 12. It is the key verse in this section.

...and therefore I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed for I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.

There is a bit of a problem with this translation. I memorized this verse in the King James' translation:

...for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

The RSV appears to consider what God has committed to Paul, and would refer to the gospel. The King James translation would seem to refer to a life that has been deposited in Christ's hands. The Greek is ambiguous. It just says, "my deposit," and it is difficult to determine whether it is something that God has deposited with Paul

or whether it is something Paul deposited in the Lord's hands. I am inclined to think it is both, that this is a deliberate ambiguity, the point being that it is God's responsibility to guard both the proclaiming of the Gospel and the application of that gospel to our lives. He is able to live through us, to inspire in us the faith that is the foundation of loyalty, and to speak through us as we proclaim the gospel, and to suffer with us as we suffer, and to be our strength as we exercise our wills to obey it, and to defend it. He will never, never allow the light of the gospel to go out. God himself is the final Guarantor.

Father, what strength there is in this passage, and what an overwhelming responsibility. We thank you for your faithfulness that you are able. We know of our inability, but we thank you that you are the One who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we could ever ask or think. That is our confidence and we rest on that fact. We rest in the name of our loving Lord, Amen.

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First Message

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