



2023 Weekly Devotions

Week of: July 31st - August 6th

Sermon: July 30th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community • equipping believers • serving Jesus

July 31

2 Timothy 1:6-7

Acts 28 ends with a description of Paul's final days on earth. Unsurprisingly, Luke tells us that the Apostle lived out his life by faithfully proclaiming the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul leveraged his final moments in life to continue to further the Kingdom and, presumably, encourage the saints.

I will admit that this is a bit of a novel approach to devotional writing this week, but I thought some about what Paul might have been saying in these last days of his life and it occurred to me that we don't have to wonder! In fact, we know that Paul's imprisonment in Rome was the occasion for his writing a few books of the Bible, the last of which is now known as 2 Timothy.

So, what I want to do this week is to look at some of the wonderful things the Apostle said to Timothy as a template for the advice he would give to all Christians who remain on this earth and therefore continue in the faith that he so loved and heralded. My prayer is that our looking at these truths together will stimulate faithfulness in our day so that we can finish strong, just like Paul some 2000 years ago.

Today's piece of advice is this: increase your affections for Christ. The Apostle says it this way, "fan into flame the gift of God which is in you..." As we commence our study of this marvelous letter, we must take into account two realities that should help us understand our mission in Christ. The first is that God has given all of His children gifts. To be fair, Timothy was a pastor and, therefore, Paul had in mind the gift of preaching/teaching. We know this because so much of the book is dedicated to talking about this gift. Nevertheless, the principle has application to all believers. If you are saved today, you have a gift that has been given to you for the purpose of furthering the Kingdom of God which was what Paul was busy doing up until the very end of his life.

Second, notice that these gifts must be "fanned". The idea here is that we must work to pour gas on the fire. Fanning into flame our gift occurs as we pursue Jesus, look to Him in our weak moments, exercise the gifts He has given and spend our lives around people and places that encourage us. There is a bit of subjectivity here as what encourages and fans your gift into flame might be slightly different than another. Nevertheless, the Apostle presumes that his beloved protégé knew how to accomplish this fact.

Do you know what fans your faith and giftedness into flame? The answer will undoubtedly be varied in our congregation, some will find that quiet time recharges their spiritual batteries, others will see their spirits revived in singing or fellowship or some other venture. Whatever it may be my dear brothers and sisters, we must seek the Lord in the things that He has given us to fan our faith into flame. The responsibility lays at our feet to prepare ourselves for the task at hand so work to know what revitalizes you and pursue those things in order to move forward in Kingdom work.

August 1

2 Timothy 1:13

Creativity has its place in life and the Kingdom. Mankind has been given a unique ability to see and cultivate things that are mind blowing even as they are totally new. However, when it comes to the truths that undergird our faith, creativity is not to be celebrated! Paul's reminder to Timothy in this verse is that there is a solid, unchanging foundation upon which the church is built. We call that foundation "sound doctrine".

In this text, the Apostle says that sound doctrine is found in the "pattern of sound words that you have heard from me." The idea is that there are certain things that are true, and they form the very template that we are to follow moving forward. As we gather to worship, read good books and hear truths in song, we must understand that all of those resources are beneficial only to the degree that they reflect and echo the sound words that form the basis for our faith.

In contrast to those who seek to learn something new, we are encouraged and instructed to figure out the old, old truths of the faith. Obviously, the Bible speaks to contemporary issues, and it takes time to formulate biblical responses to new manifestations of old problems, but the ground of our faith is unchanging.

It was important to Paul that his protégé learn and hold fast to sound doctrine and it is important to your pastors that you do the same. Our job is not to invent something but to expose what has always been present. We desire to see you walk in the faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints. We want you to confess the same Jesus and the same Gospel that Paul and Timothy preached.

These desires lead us to preach to you the same Scriptures and guard the same Gospel and we believe that in doing these things, we are passing along the same pattern to you for the battle.

Now, some might be tempted to think that this is too surface level. There are many in society that would argue that knowing truths is fine but "doing something" is the key! What good is theology and doctrine if we aren't "making a difference"? While this might sound compelling, the truth is that the battle is always won and lost on the ground of ideas. The reason why our culture is nuts is because the worldview that guides it has no foundation. People's thinking always leads to action and this means that real change must occur in hearts and minds before hands and feet see any alteration!

So, church family, follow the pattern of sound words that is so obvious and prevalent in the Scriptures. Don't wander into the new and bizarre, continue in the path that our forefathers have followed before us believing that as they entered into the eternal bliss of the Father so we will too in time.

August 2

2 Timothy 1:14

Today's text elevates Paul's admonition in the previous verse as we read that not only are we to follow the pattern of sound doctrine, we must also guard it. The term "guard" is obviously meant to denote defense and the defense of the truth obviously implies an enemy or threat. We don't defend a precious item unless we perceive that there is something or someone who is out to take it! In this case, the enemy is the deceiver, Satan himself. Satan is out to steal the truth from our presence and destroy it!

Now, some may read the above statement and wonder, how can I stand up to Satan? The answer is located in the beginning of the verse. Notice that Paul commands Timothy to guard the truth "by the Holy Spirit". It is the presence of the Spirit that gives us hope and vitality. The Spirit helps us guard the truth in two ways. First, He gives us the power to stand against Satan and his temptations. It is by the Spirit that we are sealed in the faith. The presence of the Spirit communicates to us that we are children of God, and the presence of the Spirit constitutes the means of strength that allows us to sustain in the battle.

Second, the Spirit gives us discernment. It is the Spirit who illuminates truth in our lives and teaches us what constitutes sound doctrine. This illumination has another effect however, and that is to distinguish truth from error and this distinguishing happens as we understand and embrace truth. It is in our knowledge of the truth that error becomes more and more apparent to us.

Perhaps an illustration would be helpful here. Years ago, I read an article on men and women who are trained by law enforcement to identify counterfeit. The article described the surprise of many of the students who showed up to training expecting to see examples of all kinds of abhorrent currency only to discover that the vast majority of the class was dedicated to examining legitimate dollar bills. When asked why the class focused so much on the real thing, the instructor noted that the best defense against counterfeits was an intimate knowledge of what real money looked like! If you know what's true, you can spot what doesn't conform to truth.

In the same way, the Spirit teaches us truth and this truth leads us to recognize and shirk anything that does not meet the standard of revelation. The Spirit's serves to give us wisdom and discernment and this is so that we can see threats and guard the deposit that God has so graciously given us.

So, ask the Spirit today to reveal truth to you as you study the Word. Press into the Scriptures in faith that God is revealing and equipping you to stand in the battle and work to know what the Bible says so that you can know and spot the error when the enemy inevitably attacks.

August 3

2 Timothy 2:2

As a reminder, we are looking at Paul's last preserved written words as a way of gaining some understanding into what he was proclaiming in his final days as described by Luke in Acts 28. Today's text could be summarized this way, "reproduce disciples". The Kingdom that Paul proclaimed in Acts 28 is a Kingdom that far transcends any one person, even a person as important and gifted as the Apostle Paul. This truth, that the Kingdom of God is greater than any individual, demands that more than a few serve to further the Kingdom's interest.

The process of raising more Kingdom workers is called discipleship and the work of discipleship is marvelously described for us in our verse for the day. Notice first, the ground of discipleship. We make disciples based on truth. Paul says that Timothy is to take "what you've heard from me". What exactly is he talking about? What has Timothy heard? The answer is located in a previous verse, the pattern of sound words or doctrine! Paul wanted Timothy to repeat and teach the very thing that had been relayed to him. Discipleship is not about inventing new things to say, discipleship is about passing down the very things that God has already said.

Second, notice the qualification that's mentioned as Paul says that Timothy is to find "faithful" men. The obvious question is, faithful to what? The answer is faithful to the means of grace as offered in the church. The people that Timothy was to devote the most time to pastoring and discipling were those who were present and faithfully so in the ordinary moments of church meeting and ministry. Timothy was to look for those who demonstrated commitment and hunger and to fan into flame the gifts and desires they had by pouring into them sound doctrine.

Third, notice the desired effect. The verse clearly shows us that Paul had multiple generations in mind. He had raised Timothy (2nd generation) who was to raise up others (3rd generation) for the purpose of raising up still more (4th generation). The point is that Paul had a large movement in mind, and we should as well. Church history and the Gospels expansion did not begin with us and, Lord willing, it won't end with us either. Instead, we are looking to train up men and women who will in turn train up others.

Notice finally the goal, that they would be able to "teach others". It strikes me as fascinating that Paul was so devoted to teaching. Luke tells us that he spent his final years proclaiming the Gospel and now Paul uses his final letter to remind Timothy that the goal of his ministry is to train others so that they can teach as well! The Christian faith is a faith that is dedicated to teaching truth. Our desire should be to rightly portray what we believe and to lead others to the place that they can come alongside and proclaim truth as well.

August 4

2 Timothy 2:15

Today's verse is a familiar one to our AWANA students as it is the theme verse for that ministry. In this text, we have a clear admonition from Paul to two, complimentary, undertakings that must be present if Timothy would be faithful to fulfill his charge as a pastor and Christian in expanding the Kingdom of God.

The first exhortation is to "study". The word's meaning is clear. To "study" is to be devoted to a subject by paying time and attention to its precepts in order to grasp what is being taught or presented. Part of Timothy's charge was to study, specifically to study the Word of God. If Timothy was going to be faithful and fruitful in his ministry, he needed to know the Bible and the only way he could know the Bible was to dedicate himself to studying its precepts. Folks, there is no substitute for studying God's Word! While the word itself might have a negative connotation and the activity might suspiciously look like work, the truth is that studying is a good, and right, activity for the Christian.

Timothy was expected to take the time and effort to crack open the inspired Word and dive deeply into the doctrines that were revealed. He was to devote himself to the pattern of good words in such a way that he grew in his understanding and recollection of what was true, and he was to do this so that he could be prepared to teach and preach the truth and to counsel others in more informal but impactful settings.

Second, Timothy was to "rightly divide" the Word of God. The phrase is sometimes rendered "rightly handle". It means that we must seek to discern what is being said. We must understand that the Word of God never contradicts itself and this means that we must arrive at the true interpretation by discerning what God means and, therefore, shirking what God doesn't mean. We rightly divide the truth when we take the realities of the Bible and affirm the intent while avoiding the errors that so plague the rest of the world.

In order to rightly divide the Word, we must know it in its entirety. Timothy was responsible to take what was revealed and internalize it such that any passage he taught fit with the rest of the revelation which he knew. He was to only exhort his congregation to do that which God desired and he was to avoid the errors that come from ignorance or disdain. The implication of the text, of course, is that the Bible can be wrongly divided. There are ways to abuse passages or make them appear to be asserting things that God did not intend. To guard against such things, real study (enabled and empowered by the Spirit) must take place so that the truths of the Word guard against error.

The point is simple, if we are going to continue in Kingdom work, we must study as well! There is no substitute for effort in understanding the Word. The Bible is incredibly insightful and deep, and this means that it will take time and energy to understand what it is saying. Don't run from these realities but embrace them as an exhilarating opportunity to know and understand the identity and very heart of our great God.

August 5

2 Timothy 2:22-23

Today's passage is about what not to pursue. Sometimes in life, the path to faithfulness is as much about what to avoid as it is what to chase. In this case, Paul wants Timothy to flee "youthful passions". Over the years, there have been many proposals about what was specifically on the Apostle's mind here, but I believe the answer is found in the next verse. Paul obviously had the issue of needless fights and quarrels on his mind.

As a parent to three little girls, I often see this kind of youthful and unfortunate propensity in my own home! It is not uncommon for us to hear our girls having a bit of a verbal spar over some issue that doesn't amount to much of anything! We can argue about the "best movie" or the "best restaurant" or what have you. These arguments can become heated, but they are always characterized more by heat than light.

What I mean is that human nature can be drawn into arguments and disagreements that really don't matter much. There are some things we simply cannot know, other things that we might know but don't really matter and still other topics that we cannot change. Paul's desire is that Timothy mature past the point of having to participate in and win such foolish controversies.

It strikes me that so much of what we argue about today can be labeled "foolish controversy". We can be so heated and convicted about things that have little to no eternal significance and the result is that we spend our time, energy and relational capital attempting to win arguments that will not further the Kingdom in the slightest.

Paul's desire for Timothy is that he would pursue other, more important, realities and achievements. He was to be busy growing in sanctification and associating with others who desire to know and love Jesus. He was to spend his time growing in grace and truth and he was to be busy using his mouth to further the kinds of messages that affect eternity.

The discipline of discerning what matters most and the ability to walk away from those who are adversarial and attempting to draw us into such foolish controversies takes time and maturity. Sometimes its necessary to walk away from discussions and people in order to focus on the task that God has given, may we all understand this and not be drawn into distracting circumstances in keeping with Paul's heart for Timothy.

August 6

2 Timothy 4:2

The final passage is my personal favorite in all of Scripture. I love the passion and earnestness with which this text was written, and I discern such things in the verse in light of the author. Paul loved to preach Christ. In fact, his entire saved life was dedicated to making Jesus known. His example tells us that what he wrote to Timothy in this precious verse was foremost on his mind and this means that we can sense his earnest desire in the words that he writes.

Verse 1 includes an important word as the Apostle “charges” Timothy to fulfill this task. We don’t often use the word charge in this sense anymore, but its significance is important to understand the text at hand. The term denotes a divine, constant and compelling command given by a superior to fulfill some task. Paul was telling Timothy that God had ordained that he be constantly faithful to this exhortation.

What was the charge? Specifically, Timothy was to “preach the Word.” He was to preach the Word “in season and out of season.” This means that he was to be ready to preach whether it was convenient or not, he was to preach whether he had time to prepare for that message or whether he was offered a chance to speak truth in an instant. He was to preach the Word in all places, at all times and for the rest of his life.

Stated simply, Timothy’s life was to be dedicated to preaching the Word. If you think about it, the entire book has led us to this charge. Timothy’s preaching was to be in keeping with sound doctrine, it was to be a product of his study (after all, how could he preach out of season if he didn’t know what was in the book already?) it was to be for the purpose of raising up disciples and in avoidance of participating in false controversies. Everything was meant to be geared towards this task.

Paul lived this way, he desired Timothy to live this way and their collective example should provide a template for our lives as well. Folks, I realize that most of you are not vocational preachers but the message of Christ crucified is not meant to be only propagated by pastors. All of us have the joy and privilege of preaching and teaching the Word of God in our homes, at our place of business, in our personal lives and as we are going. May we be as dedicated to that task in our day as Paul was in his and may we see in our lifetime the kind of fruit that God blessed the dear Apostle with some two thousand years ago!