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SAVED TO SERVE

1 Timothy 1:1-2

By

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1 Timothy Lesson 1

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A cartoon showed a picture of a woman lying in her sick bed, obviously in misery. In the sink were stacked piles of dirty dishes. A huge basket of clothes to be ironed sat nearby. Two dirty children were fighting in one corner, and in the other a cat sat licking spilled milk. A smiling woman stood in the doorway and the caption had her saying, "Well, Florence, if there is anything I can do to help, don't hesitate to let me know."

What a picture of the local church! Pastors and church staff are overwhelmed with work. More needy people cry out for their attention than they have time for. Sunday school and other youth programs lack workers. Visitors need a personal call. New people need someone to befriend them. The missions program needs dedicated workers. Facilities need maintenance and improvements. Even some who are involved seem to be committed only when it's convenient. And yet people often say, "If there's anything I can do to help, let me know!"

The fact is, God does not save us so we can sit, but so we can serve. Just as there is no such thing as a non-functioning member of your human body, so there ought to be no such thing as a non-functioning member of the body of Christ. If God has saved you from your sin, He has called you to serve Him in some way in accordance with your gifts and abilities.

What often happens is, you hear this truth taught, so you take a stab at getting involved in doing something for the Lord. But not very far into the process, you find yourself in over your head. You thought you would be serving in line with your gifts and abilities, but you find yourself overwhelmed with inadequacy as you face a situation not in line with or far beyond your gifts and abilities. You thought you would be having a wonderful time of fellowship with others in the body, but instead you find fellow Christians being petty, criticizing you for picayune things. You thought everyone would like you, but they're not being nice. You thought everyone

would appreciate your contribution, but instead, you haven't heard a word of thanks. You thought serving the Lord would be kind of fun, but you discover that it's fun like war is fun.

BACKGROUND: Timothy found himself there. He had been a teenager in a home with a pagan father and a Jewish mother, living in the town of Lystra in what is today south-central Turkey. His mother and grandmother had taught him the Scriptures, but he didn't know that Jesus was the promised Messiah until a rabbi named Paul came to town. Paul healed a man who had been lame from birth and preached the gospel, but then was stoned by the fickle mob and dragged out of the city, thought to be dead. Amazingly, he got up, went back into the city and left the next day. Later he courageously returned and strengthened those who had believed, saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

Timothy was one who had believed. In the years that followed, he grew in the Lord and was highly regarded by the church for his ministry in their midst. Then the Apostle Paul came through town again and this time he invited Timothy to join him in his itinerant ministry. What an opportunity, to travel and serve with this courageous man of God who had led Timothy to faith in Christ! Timothy would have been in his early twenties, Paul near 50 at the time. For about the next 18 years, until Paul was beheaded by Nero, Timothy served with Paul, as a devoted son would serve his father.

The Book of Acts ends with Paul in prison in Rome. There is good reason to believe that he was released around A.D. 62, shortly after writing the "prison epistles" (Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians). Timothy had been in Rome with Paul (Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Philemon 1), so perhaps after Paul's release, the two men made their way to Ephesus, among other places, where Paul left Timothy to deal with some matters while he went on to Macedonia (Philippi and Thessalonica). From there, sometime between late 62 and early 64, Paul wrote First Timothy to his younger co-worker, to encourage him in his ministry there and to give apostolic instructions on church life for the whole congregation (3:15).

Serving Christ with and under the Apostle Paul sounds wonderful and exciting, but it wasn't idyllic! Paul's early message, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God," proved all too true. Timothy often felt like he was in far over his head. Timid and shy by personality, he was not inclined toward conflict; yet he often found himself in the midst of controversy. He was inclined to back off rather than to confront difficult people and situations. Many times he felt like quitting.

And this was one of those times! We often hear people talk about the New Testament church as if it were nearly perfect. I don't know which Bible they read, but my Bible shows that there were some serious problems in many New Testament churches. Ephesus was a town rife with sexual immorality and occult practices. As often happens in such places, the church was being plagued by some false teachers (we'll look next week at who they may have been). Timothy's task is summed up in 1:3, 4: "Remain on at Ephesus in order that you may instruct [lit., "command"] certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies"

On the surface, that sounds simple. But as you can imagine, people are not detached from their strange doctrines! In fact, people get emotionally attached to their strange doctrines! When your job is to confront their doctrines, they take it personally.

Do you get the picture? Here is this timid, shy, peace-loving, ordinary man who finds himself in a church where some men were teaching some strange things and it was Timothy's job to confront them. No doubt there were people in the church who liked these men and who thought their teaching was helpful and good: "How dare this young man come in here and say that these men are wrong!" So Paul wrote this letter to bolster Timothy and the truth he was proclaiming in this church that had been infected with these false teachers.

The message of the book can be summed up with the command, "Guard the deposit of sound doctrine!" In 1:18 Paul tells Timothy that he is (lit.) "depositing" the command to him (to stay on at Ephesus and teach the truth). He doesn't say, "Have fun at the Sunday School picnic"; but rather, "Fight the good fight!" He

repeats the command at the end of the book, "O Timothy, guard what has been deposited [lit.] with you."

A number of themes occur under the overall theme of guarding the deposit of sound doctrine. The theme of sound doctrine or teaching occurs repeatedly (1:10; 3:2; 4:6, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:3), as well as the warning against turning aside to false teaching (1:3, 6, 19; 4:1-3; 5:15; 6:3-5, 10, 20-21). The theme of faith (meaning personal trust in Christ and the Word--1:2, 4, 5, 14; 2:7, 15; 4:12; 5:12; 6:11) and "the faith" (meaning Christian doctrine and practice--1:19; 3:9, 13; 4:1, 6; 5:8; 6:10, 12, 21) occur repeatedly. Also, the practical outworking of such faith, namely, godliness, is a major theme (2:2, 10; 3:16; 4:7, 8; 6:3, 5, 6, 11). A brief outline:

1. Sound doctrine related to the gospel message (ch. 1).
2. Sound doctrine in the church (chs. 2 & 3):
 - A. In church practice (ch. 2).
 - B. In church leadership and purpose (ch. 3).
3. Sound doctrine for church leadership (chs. 4-6):
 - A. To preserve pastors from apostasy (ch. 4).
 - B. To promote practical pastoral wisdom (chs. 5 & 6).

With that as an overview of the book and its setting, let's look at Paul's greeting (1:1-2). We can draw the lesson:

God has saved us and conscripted us into service so that we might bring forth true children in the faith.

Verse 1, where Paul identifies himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior," shows us how God saves us and conscripts us into service. Verse 2, which addresses Timothy as Paul's true child in the faith shows us that the goal of our service is to reproduce ourselves spiritually, as Paul had done with Timothy.

1. God has saved us and conscripted us into service (1:1).

The foundation for any service we render to God must be the glorious truth that:

A. God has saved us.

Paul uses an unusual phrase in this verse: "God our Savior." This description occurs six times in the pastoral epistles (here, 2:3; 4:10; Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4) and nowhere else in Paul's writings. It occurs elsewhere only in Jude 25, with a similar expression, "God my Savior" in Luke 1:47. In fact, the word "Savior" is only used 24 times in the New Testament, including 10 times in the pastoral epistles and five in 2 Peter.

The designation of God as our Savior is rooted in the Old Testament. But, significantly, when you come to the New Testament, Jesus is designated as the Savior (Luke 2:11), which shows that Jesus is God. His very name means "Yahweh saves." The angel explained to Joseph that the reason for naming the child in Mary's womb "Jesus" is that He would save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). One reason Paul may have emphasized this term for God in the pastoral epistles is that the corrupt emperor Nero had assumed the title, "Savior of the world," for himself. Paul is countering that by stating, "No, Nero, you are not the Savior; only God can save!"

This is a truth that constantly needs to be reaffirmed because the proud human heart constantly does what Nero did--if not to claim to be the Savior of the world, at least to claim to be my own Savior. Proud people think that because they are worthy, or by their own efforts or good deeds or will power, they can save themselves from God's wrath against their sin. But the message of the cross of Jesus Christ humbles human pride by stating, "No flesh shall boast before God" (1 Cor. 1:29).

We need to proclaim clearly the message that people are lost and need a Savior, not just that they need a little improvement or help. The gospel message is not, "If your life lacks fulfillment or if you're having a few problems, try Jesus." The gospel message is, "Apart from Christ, you are lost, perishing, under God's judgment! You cannot save yourself. God does not save any who are worthy, because none are worthy. But in His grace, God does save unworthy sinners who take refuge in Jesus and His shed blood on the cross. So trust in Him!"

I fear lest anyone in this church may be serving God who have not first been saved by God. I fear that there may be some who serve God in an attempt to earn His favor. Paul himself had been there. He was zealous in religion, keeping the law outwardly, (Phil. 3:6), advancing beyond many of his contemporaries. But then God, who had set Paul apart from his mother's womb and called him by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son to Paul on the Damascus Road, and Paul was saved (Gal. 1:13-15).

It's possible to be raised in the church, to be outwardly religious, to be zealous in what you think is serving God, but not to be saved. Make sure that God is truly your Savior. Then you can serve Him.

B. God has conscripted those He has saved into service.

If God has saved you from the awful judgment you deserved, then you are not your own. You've been bought with a price, the precious blood of Jesus; you are under orders. Paul did not dream up the idea of becoming an apostle. It wasn't his career objective, determined by taking a number of occupational and personality tests. He was an apostle "according to the commandment of God our Savior." That means that ...

(1) Those who are saved are conscripts, not volunteers for Jesus. In Sunday School, I used to sing songs about being a volunteer for Jesus. The underlying notion behind that is that you can choose to serve if you want to, but it's optional. But service is not an option for those who are so inclined. Serving Jesus is mandatory for all who have been saved by Jesus! You don't volunteer for Jesus' army; you've been drafted! The only question is, will you be a faithful servant or an unfaithful one?

We need to be careful here, because the church in our day has created a false distinction between those who are supported financially by their ministries and those who are not. The former are thought to be "called" to serve God; the latter are not called, they're just "laymen" who volunteer some of their spare time. But Paul didn't know any such distinction. If you go by this system, Paul was a layman, because he supported himself in ministry most of the time!

But the teaching of the Bible is not that some Christians are called to serve God and others are not. Every Christian is saved to serve! The matter of how you are supported may depend on the type of service to which you are called. Those who labor at preaching and teaching and those sent out as missionaries have a right to be supported (1 Tim. 5:17-18; 1 Cor. 9:1-14). But God hasn't saved anyone so they can just sit around. Every person God saves is conscripted into serving Him according to how God has gifted him (1 Pet. 4:10-11).

Does that mean that service is easy or without struggles? Not at all! Serving Christ means waging war against the spiritual forces of darkness and warfare is not easy. Sometimes warriors get discouraged. Timothy was prone to discouragement. So Paul shows him from the outset that ...

(2) Christ Himself is our hope in serving. "Christ Jesus, our hope" (v. 1). What a great phrase! Our hope is not in a religion. Our hope is not in human beings. Our hope is not in a better world. "Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness!" Christ Jesus Himself is our hope!

Biblical hope is not an uncertain wish for a better tomorrow. Biblical hope is certain, but not yet realized. It is certain because our hope rests on the *resurrected Christ*, whose bodily resurrection from the grave is an attested fact of history. Our hope believes in the *reigning Christ*, seated at the right hand of God, far above all rule and authority (Eph. 1:20-23). Our hope waits for the *returning Christ*, who has given us His sure word that He will return bodily to rule the nations with a rod of iron (Acts 1:11; Rev. 19:15). Hallelujah! Because such a Savior is our hope, we can serve Him and know that our labor is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

What is the aim of our service? Ultimately, it is to bring glory to God. But one of the main ways we do that is by working to bring people into submission to God as His true children.

2. The aim of our service is to bring forth true children in the faith (1:2).

Paul addresses Timothy as his "true child in the faith" (or, "in faith," meaning faith in the gospel). The word "true" points to the genuineness of Timothy's conversion as attested by his years of

faithfulness in the Lord (Homer Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles* [Moody Press], p. 77). Modern evangelistic methods teach us to follow up a person who has prayed to receive Christ by giving him immediate assurance of salvation. But it takes longer than a few minutes or even a few months to determine if a person's profession of faith in Christ is genuine. Paul expressed concern for the Corinthians and the Galatians that they may have "believed in vain" (1 Cor. 15:2; Gal. 3:4). He said to the Galatians (4:19), "My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you." They had professed Christ, but Paul was not yet certain if they were true children or not.

Paul urged the Corinthians, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test?" (2 Cor. 13:5). Peter exhorts his readers, "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you" (2 Pet. 1:10). John wrote his first epistle to give his readers a number of tests by which they could know that they had eternal life (see the entire book of 1 John, but esp. 5:13).

Timothy had grown up in a home with a godly mother and grandmother who had taught him the Scriptures that lead to salvation through faith in Christ (2 Tim. 3:15). But he had not believed in Christ unto salvation until he heard Paul's preaching. Timothy's experience shows that even if you're in a mixed marriage, as a believing parent you need to teach your children the Scriptures with a view to their salvation. God may use you or He may use your teaching coupled with someone else's preaching to bring your children to faith in Christ.

How can we know if we are true children of God? Many sermons could be preached on this and I must be brief! Note the marks listed here:

(1) True children know the grace of God. Grace is the sweetest sound to those who are true children of God, because it means that He pours out His favor on the undeserving. He calls sinners, not the righteous.

(2) True children know the mercy of God. In his greetings, Paul adds this word only here and in 2 Timothy (the addition in the

KJV of Titus rests on weak manuscript support). While grace points to God's forgiveness to the guilty, His mercy points to His kindness to the miserable or helpless. Every true child of God knows His mercy.

(3) True children know the peace of God. God's peace is more than just inner calm, although it is that. It refers to the overall well-being of a person who has been reconciled to God. Such a person experiences God's blessings, even in times of suffering and sorrow. It is a peace that surpasses human understanding (Phil. 4:6-7). God's children know His peace.

(4) True children know God as Father. The Bible reveals God as the kind, caring Father of His true children. Even if you had a harsh, unloving earthly father or no father at home, you can come to know God as your true Heavenly Father as revealed in His Word. One of the marks of believers is that they know God as Father.

(5) True children know Christ Jesus as Lord. The distinction between Christ as Savior and Christ as Lord is a false one. He is clearly both Savior and Lord. If you are not living each day by yielding to Jesus as your Lord, you ought to question whether He is truly your Savior. Many will say to Him at the judgment, "Lord, Lord, we did many things in Your name." But He will say to them those awful words, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt. 7:21-23). True children know Christ Jesus both as Savior and Lord.

Conclusion

Do you know God as your Savior? If not, do not rest until you do! If so, then know that He has saved you to serve. The aim of that service is to bring glory to Him by you becoming His true child in faith and by your bringing others to become His true children in faith, as Paul did with Timothy.

D. L. Moody was an uneducated shoemaker whom God saved. A man named Reynolds told about the first time he ever saw D. L. Moody, before Moody became famous. Moody was in a little shanty that had been abandoned by a saloon keeper, holding a small black boy in his arms, reading to him the story of the prodigal son. Moody couldn't even read all the words, so he had to skip

them. Reynolds thought, "If God can ever use such an instrument as that for His honor and glory, it will certainly astonish me!" Yet we all know how God used D. L. Moody. He can use you and me that way, just as He used shy, timid Timothy. We've been saved to serve!

Discussion Questions

1. Must salvation be a dramatic experience (like Paul's) or can it be a quiet recognition? Cite Scripture.
2. How can a person know if he (or she) is called to "full-time" Christian service? Is the term a misnomer?
3. Is being overwhelmed by inadequacy a sign that you're not in God's will in serving Him? How can you know?
4. Is every Christian supposed to bring others to Christ or is that just the responsibility of those so gifted?

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