

CHURCH IMPROVEMENT: BUILDING A CHURCH THAT HONORS GOD AND LOVES PEOPLE BY GUARDING THE GOSPEL

2 Timothy 1: 8-14

Please review this week's catechism.

INTRODUCTION

Describe an obsessed person you have met. What are some common characteristics of all obsessed people? Have you ever been obsessed by someone or something?

An obsessed person is someone that no matter what subject comes up in a conversation, he finds it relates to the topic or person with which he is obsessed. This is a person who spends all her free time learning about and enjoying her obsession. The people he hangs out with share his obsession or he is trying to persuade them to share it. He will spare no expense to pursue his obsession and disdains all that disapprove of his fixation. She's like the most rabid salesperson you can imagine run amok.

Read Philippians 3: 7-17. What indications are there in this passage the Paul was an obsessed man? What was he obsessed with? Does he think that all Christians should share his obsession?

Paul was obsessed with knowing Jesus Christ and following him safely to heaven, no matter what the cost. He was convinced that every Christian should share the same obsession.

When Paul commands Timothy to not be ashamed of the gospel he is stating in a negative way what he says positively in Philippians 3. He wants Timothy to be completely obsessed with Jesus Christ and spreading his message. In vv. 8-14 we will see four reasons why Christians are obsessed with Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the gospels, no matter the cost.

STUDY

1. What is it that Paul doesn't want Timothy to do and what does he want him to do in v. 8? Try to describe this in your own words.

He doesn't want Timothy to be embarrassed by the gospel of Jesus or of Paul who is in prison for sharing the gospel. He doesn't want Timothy to be afraid of what others will think of him or do to him. He doesn't want Timothy to stop being a Christian or to stop preaching the gospel because he is afraid what happened to Paul will happen to him. He wants Timothy to be openly proud of Jesus and of Paul, the prisoner of Jesus. He wants Timothy to join in suffering for the gospel.

2. What is the implication Paul makes about the Christian life by commanding Timothy to not be ashamed but to join in suffering for the gospel?

Paul presumes that being a Christian and especially being a Christian pastor requires courage and a willingness to suffer. He expects followers of Christ to have to suffer the loss of earthly pleasures and comforts and to endure the hostility of others. It goes with the territory so to speak.

3. How is it helpful to be told that being a Christian requires suffering? (See John 16:1-4, Acts 14:21-22, 1 Thess. 3: 1-5, 1 Peter 1:6-7, 4: 12-19, etc.)

There are few worse things in life than having your expectations raised about some experience or person only to discover that the reality is nothing close to the promise. The greater the difference between the promise and the experience, the greater the anger, bitterness and despondency you experience. Knowing that following Christ requires suffering the loss of earthly pleasure and comfort and enduring the hostility of others enables us to continue trusting Christ when it comes because we are not surprised. We expect it and so willingly endure it as necessary to obtain the salvation promised by Christ.

4. What are some ways you have joined in suffering for the gospel?

Christians are obsessed with Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the gospel, no matter the cost, because they expect to suffer.

At the end of v. 8 Paul tells Timothy to join in suffering for the gospel by the power of God. He then goes on to describe how God has exercised his power in saving his people.

5. According to v. 9 what has God done? What does this mean?

He saved us and he called us to a holy calling. Whenever a person says they've been saved the obvious question is, what have you been saved from? The greater the danger and the more powerless you were to save yourself, the more joy there is in your salvation, the more glorious is the one who saved you. If you are a person who can say, God saved me, you are the most fortunate of persons. We were trapped in sin and destined for an eternal hell and then God, with no help from us, saved us. Notice though that Paul emphasizes not only that God saved us but tells how he did it and what the result of salvation is. First he tells us that this salvation is effected by God's calling us. This is one of those occasions when Paul is referring not simply to the fact that we heard the gospel of Jesus but that God made the gospel of Jesus effective in our lives. He is referring to the fact that God not only commanded us to repent and believe the gospel but he gave us the desire and power to repent and believe. Then the call of God results in a holy life. This is the evidence of the miracle. Rather than being taken up with sin and the pleasures of this life, we are now taken up with Christ and a life that pleases him. My dear friends, if you are a saved person, you are a walking miracle. There is no greater miracle in the entire universe than that a sinner is saved from sin and into a holy life.

6. What did not motivate God and what did motivate God to do this?

God did not save us and call us into a holy life because of anything we ever did. In other words, God's saving work is not in response to anything in us, including our faith. He does not "see" something in

us that makes us worthy of salvation. Faith is the first result of God's salvation and his calling (Eph 2:8-10). Rather, God is motivated to save us according to his own purpose. He intends to display the glory of his own power and mercy in saving sinners. His purpose is to show off his greatness in our salvation (Ezekiel 36: 22-23, Eph. 3:10, etc.). In addition he saves us according to his grace. He delights to save unworthy sinners because he is a God of grace. He saves according to the freedom of his grace, not conditioned upon anything that we have done. He delights to show off his grace by saving sinners who deserve hell.

7. When did God purpose our salvation and determine to make us objects of his grace?

He did this before time began. Before God made anything, he determined whom he would save and call to a holy calling according to his own purpose and grace.

8. Jesus is the one who makes God's purpose to be gracious real in the lives of individuals. What did/does Jesus do to make the grace of God real to his people?

He appeared and acted as our Savior by obeying God's law and dying the death we deserved. When he did this he destroyed the power of death for his people and he brought life and immortality to life through the gospel. The gospel is the announcement of what Christ did to save us. Death is dead and life and immortality have been revealed as our destiny because of Jesus' appearing and acting as our Savior.

9. How would this description of God's salvation through Jesus help Timothy to not be ashamed but willingly join in suffering for the gospel?

What Paul aims to do in these verses is to display the miraculous nature, stunning power and awe-inspiring benefits of God's salvation. He is showing why it is that Timothy can be proud of the gospel, why embarrassment is an irrational response to the gospel.

It makes as much sense for a person who claims to be a Christian to be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is for a Packer fan to be ashamed of the Packers winning the Super Bowl in 1997. Jesus' life and death makes it possible for this just and holy God to forgive and reward with eternal life, criminals like us. How can we be ashamed of this great God and this great Savior and this great salvation? There is no place for despondency and faint heartedness. There is never reason to believe you have been abandoned by God. If you are a saved person, nothing and no one can harm you. If death is dead and you have been given life and immortality, then what can men do to you?

10. Does God's saving work amaze you as it ought?

Christians are obsessed with Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the gospel, no matter the cost, because they are stunned by the grace of God in Christ.

11. Read 2 Timothy 4: 6-18. What is Paul's condition when he writes this letter? According to 1:11-12 why is he suffering in this fashion?

Paul is in prison in Rome. He has been through one trial during which no one supported him. He is certain he is about to die, probably through being fed to the lions in Rome's coliseum. He is alone among his enemies. He is in this situation because God appointed him to be a preacher, an apostle and a teacher of the gospel. In other words, he is in this trouble because of God. It would appear that God has abandoned him. There is no earthly evidence that God is caring for him or that God loves him.

12. In spite of the suffering Paul is enduring, how does he know that he is not abandoned by God? Why is he not fearful of the future or wondering about God's feelings about him?

Paul's use of this language does not simply refer to his emotional state. He is stating that in spite of appearances he knows that God

has not abandoned him. His suffering is not the result of God's displeasure or his judgment against him. He knows it because he knows God. What he knows is what he just summarized in vv. 9-10. He knows that God has saved him and called him to a holy life by means of the appearing of Jesus. He knows that he need not fear death but has eternal life with God to look forward to because he knows God. Second he is not ashamed because he knows that God has promised to preserve his faith. He is confident that God will not allow the suffering he is enduring to destroy his faith. God will guard his eternal life and God will guard the gospel Paul is entrusted with preaching. In other words, Paul knows that God will keep him safe through all his trials and safely bring him to heaven and he knows God will guard the gospel and even though Paul dies the gospel will continue to spread.

How do you know that God loves you and will not abandon you?

How do you know that God exists, that he loves you, that you have a glorious future ahead of you? Do you know it because you're not sick or you have a good job or because you bought a new house? I'll be quite honest with you. I am frightened by how much talk I hear among Christians that they know God loves them because of the earthly benefits we receive. It doesn't take a supernatural work of God for a human to be excited about good health, sufficient money or many friends. Listen, every good gift comes from God. However, the ultimate and primary way that you know that God exists and that he is for you is because of what he has done for you in Christ. Paul knows that God is for him because contrary to what he deserves and against every expectation; God gave his only Son to die for his sins. God sent his Holy Spirit to him and spoke light into his dark heart so that he sees the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Christians are obsessed with Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the gospel, no matter the cost, because they are secure in his love & power.

13. Paul concludes this section of his letter by giving Timothy two commands. Though they look similar they are not identical. The

first command is literally “have” or “possess”. What is the “pattern of sound teaching”? (See 1 Timothy 6:3) What does it mean for Timothy to “have it” or “possess it”?

What Paul is saying here is that there is a true doctrine that comes from Jesus to the apostles and then through them to us. Paul tells Timothy that he must keep or possess this true doctrine and reject every false doctrine. The verb that is used is the simple verb, “to have”. It is the verb of possession. The idea here is that Timothy is to thoroughly know, delight in, and have as his personal possession the true doctrines of God as revealed through Jesus Christ and contained in this book. He is to have his fingerprints all over this doctrine. It is to occupy his attention. He is to study and think about and work at knowing what has been revealed. Timothy is to be a student of the truth that has been revealed. This is the first duty of every Christian. We are to learn the gospel. We are not all called or gifted to be theologians and teachers but we are all called to study doctrine.

14. Why is it important for Timothy to study and learn and “possess” the pattern of sound doctrine? (CLUE: look at the end of v. 13)

Timothy is to learn and keep this doctrine “in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” In other words, the purpose and point of learning and keeping the doctrine isn’t so you can win Bible trivia contests. It is so that you can trust Jesus and love Jesus. You cannot trust or love Jesus if you do not know the truth of Jesus. Yet, simply knowing the truth will not guarantee that you trust and love Jesus. There are two errors to avoid. If I know true doctrine then I know Jesus. That’s no more true than the baseball fan who knows the stats and history of his favorite player saying that therefore he knows the player. At the same time, you cannot know Jesus if you don’t know the true doctrine of Christ. You can claim to know Jesus but when you show up at his throne on the judgment day you will simply hear those fatal words, “Depart from me, I never knew you.”

15. What are you doing to have as your personal possession the “pattern of sound doctrine” that is the gospel of Jesus? What more could or should you do?

16. In v. 14 Paul also commands Timothy to “guard” the good deposit he has received. What does this mean? (NOTE: This is the same verb Paul used in v. 12 when he said the God is able to guard what he entrusted to him)

The gospel is always under attack. Satan is out to destroy God’s work in the world through deception and so we live in a world full of competing claims about the nature of God and of Christ and of the gospel. There is a war going on in which ignorance and naiveté are the greatest threat. If you do not know the true gospel you will never recognize false gospels. If you think that just because someone uses the Bible and talks about Jesus he must be a Christian, you are in mortal danger. There is only one Christ who can save you and one gospel and to remain ignorant of it is to expose yourself to the danger of eternal hell by being deceived. Guarding is not simply a personal thing however. It implies that we are in a community of believers that is determined to preserve and keep the truth about Christ as it has been revealed as purely as we are able to do so.

17. Why does he add that Timothy is to guard it by the power of the Holy Spirit?

This guarding of the gospel is done by the power of the Holy Spirit. There is a play on words between vv. 12 & 14. In v. 12 God guard’s both the message and the messenger and in v. 14 the messenger is told to guard the gospel. You must think, study, memorize. However, your only hope of being kept in the truth of the gospel comes from the supernatural, light giving work of the Holy Spirit. The only hope that your guarding will succeed is that God guards you and his truth by his Holy Spirit. The Spirit’s purpose, as Jesus said in John 16 is to take from belongs to Jesus and make it known to us. His goal is to make Christ appear glorious to us in and through the gospel. We must daily plead with him to enable us to behold Christ in the truth we study and learn.

18. What are some ways you are seeking to have and to guard this good deposit?

Christians are obsessed with Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the gospel, no matter the cost, because they experience Christ through the gospel.