

## Acts 16:1-5; 2<sup>nd</sup> Tim. 1:1-5

### Raising Our Children to be Timothys

How do you want your children to turn out? I dare say this is probably the chief concern that dominates the minds and hearts of Christian parents. Young couples who were able to live in a rather carefree manner all of a sudden feel a great sense of responsibility when once a new addition comes into their homes.

I remember a time years ago shortly after I became a Christian that a man where I worked approached me after his wife had delivered a baby. This man had never shown any interest in the things of God but was bent on his loose lifestyle that characterized those days. Now with a new addition in his family he was all of a sudden religiously conscious. Or it might be more accurate to say he had become superstitious. He wanted to know my view on whether or not he should have his baby baptized. I say he was superstitious because he wondered whether or not this *magical rite* could secure his child for heaven. The man was in gross spiritual darkness but I can't help but marvel at the sense of responsibility he all of a sudden felt for his new born baby.

How much more do real Christians feel the weight of this responsibility! And yet a recent Barna study from a while back concluded that many even most Christian parents were ill equipped to take on the task of their children's spiritual development.

*According to the research, parents typically have no plan for the spiritual development of their children; do not consider it a priority, have little or no training in how to nurture a child's faith, have no related standards or goals that they are seeking to satisfy, and experience no accountability for their efforts.*

In the opening verses of Acts 16 we are introduced to a young man who did receive good training as a child. We're told in v. 1 that *Timotheus was the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek.* We are further told in v. 2 that this young man – Timothy, was *well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.*

Here, then, was a young man who, in spite of challenging circumstances in his home, came forth as a tremendous trophy of grace – a young man who would be raised up by God to become the primary assistant to the Apostle Paul. Paul would look upon this young man as his son in the faith and he would refer to him as a brother, a minister of God, and a fellowlaborer in the gospel of Christ (1Thess. 3:2). So close would be the association between Paul and Timothy that many of Paul's epistles would be addressed to the churches as not merely coming from Paul – but from Paul and Timothy.

So we read:

- 2 Corinthians 1:1 *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy [our] brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth.*

- Philippians 1:1 *Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi.*
- Colossians 1:1 *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus [our] brother.*

The same thing is found in 1Thess, 2Thess, and Philemon – indicating to us the close identification with Timothy to Paul and more importantly to the gospel that Paul preached. Oh that our sons and our daughters would grow up to become such supporters of the gospel of Jesus Christ! I'm sure most parents are not unduly concerned about whether or not their children become doctors or lawyers or janitors or burger cooks for fast-food restaurants. But oh that they may become saved and sanctified servants of Christ who consider it their primary duty in life to promote the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Now I find it interesting that in these verses which give us our first look at Timothy we're introduced to his home life. And it wasn't a perfect situation on that home front – and yet the grace of God nevertheless prevailed in the heart and life of this young man. I would like us to consider Timothy this evening – in the context of his home life, his character, and the kind of training that he received.

And as we focus on this young man who would become the chosen assistant of Paul I want you to be both challenged and encouraged to raise your children to become Timothys. That would seem like a daunting challenge at the first mention of it. But I think you'll see as we proceed in this study that it was grace that prevailed in the life of this young man. And the fact that it is God's grace that prevails gives us hope and encouragement when it comes to the matter of raising our children.

Raising our children to be Timothys, then, is our theme:

## We Can and We Should Raise Our Children to be Timothys

And in the moments that remain I would like to consider how this task is to be accomplished. Consider with me first of all that if we would raise our children to be Timothys:

### I. We Must See the Potential -

And when I speak of this potential, I'm not now referring to the character of Timothy (we'll get to that in a moment or two) but I'm referring rather to the potential for God's grace to prevail in our homes.

I find this first point to be most encouraging because I'm keenly aware and I'm sure that my children and probably your children are keenly aware that all is not perfect sanctity and piety and devotion in our homes. And a close look into the description given us of Timothy's home will reveal to us that all was not perfect piety in his home either.

Let me demonstrate to you what I mean. We read from 2<sup>nd</sup> Tim. 1:5 that Timothy came from a line of unfeigned faith that was traceable first to his grandmother, Lois, and then to his Mother, Eunice, and at last to Timothy himself. And yet in this first verse in Acts 16 we're told that Timothy's Mother was a Jewess who believed **but his father was a Greek**.

Underscore that word **but**. It indicates to us a marked contrast between Timothy's Mother and his Father. And I think it would be fair to read this contrast not only into the nationality of Timothy's parents but into the spirituality of his parents also. His Mother was a Jewess – **but** his Father was a Greek. She was a believer **but** by implication his Father was not.

We also know from 2<sup>nd</sup> Tim. 3 that Timothy was instructed in the scriptures as a child. It would seem then that his Mother had also been trained in those scriptures and that his grandmother would have been among those who waited for the consolation of Israel. How is it, then, that this Jewish lady whose Mother possessed unfeigned faith ends up married to a Greek? Such a thing was forbidden in the Mosaic economy. It was a clear violation of the separation that God commanded of His people.

Could it be that at some point in her life her emotions trumped her discernment? Could it be that at some point in her life she had a lapse in her faith and rebelled against the teachings that would have been given to her and she married a Greek and an unbeliever? Maybe her Mother had been married to an indifferent Jew or maybe she also was married to a Greek. We can't say for sure – but the picture does emerge from this description of the home that Timothy's Mother for whatever reason entered into a mixed marriage that would have been viewed as contemptible by her Jewish peers. It was a clear violation of the principle of separation that was to characterize the Jews.

And I think we can gather also from the text that in spite of the unfeigned faith in Timothy's Mother all was not smooth and easy in that mixed home. His Mother's religion did not hold full sway in that house. And I draw that deduction from the fact that at the time the apostle Paul first met Timothy, he had not been circumcised. Had the Jewish religion held sway in that home Timothy would have been circumcised when he was 8 days old.

We can see, then, upon consideration of the circumstances that would have taken place in Timothy's family that this was not an ideal family situation – and yet, grace prevailed. Salvation was wrought in the heart of this young man and he came forth with a testimony that shined. So we read in v. 2 that *he was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium*.

We see in this family an illustration of what Paul writes to the Corinthians in 1Cor. 7:13,14 – *And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is*

*sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.*

The children of mixed marriages have the benefit of the covenant promises of God. God sees them as set apart which means that even in such circumstances the believer in a mixed marriage can expect that grace will prevail in the end.

This is our hope. This is to our encouragement – the realization that grace will prevail in the end. And if this is the case in a family situation that is less than ideal – we can expect that it will be the case in all our families – because I dare suggest that in one way or another we all fall short of that ideal.

The potential, then, is for our children to emerge as Timothys not because our spirituality is so impressive – Oh we need to be striving for consistency in our spirituality but my hope is not in that consistency – my hope, rather, is in the prevailing grace of Jesus Christ. Because of the covenant promises the potential is very real for our sons and daughters to come forth as shining trophies of grace. May God help us to pray for it, to strive for it, and to expect it by faith.

The first step then, so to speak, in raising our children to be Timothys is to see the potential for God's grace to prevail. But would you note with me next that:

## II. We Must Realize the Aim –

What exactly are we aiming for? What does it mean to raise our children to be Timothys? And we come now to consider for a moment the character of this man Timothy. Why is it that we want to raise our children to be like this man? What exactly do I mean when I say we must raise our children to be Timothys?

I've referred in a couple of instances to the general statement that is given to us in v. 2. Let me read that statement again – *Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.* The city of Derbe was located East of the cities of Lystra and Iconium. If you look at a map you'll see that Lystra and Iconium are in very close proximity to each other. The sources I've consulted take the view that Timothy was from Lystra. But the text indicates to us that his reputation was not restricted to his home town. The brethren in the neighboring town of Iconium also recognized the qualities in this young man, Timothy.

What did these brethren see in this young man that made him stand out and led the apostle Paul to choose him to be his companion in the gospel? We can note a number of things about him that we discover in the book of Acts and in the epistles that are addressed to him.

Let's consider first – **his courage.** We know already from previous chapters in the book of Acts that there were times of persecution. The Spirit of God was moving upon hearts but the wrath of man was also stirred up among the Christ rejecters. You may recall from Paul's first missionary journey that it was at Timothy's home town of Lystra

that Paul had healed a crippled man. And at first the inhabitants of the city were so enamored with Paul and Barnabas that they were ready to deify them. But when the Jews arrived they were able to stir up the fickle mob to stone Paul and leave him for dead. This took place in the very city where Timothy lived. In chp. 17 we find the antagonists of the gospel pursuing Paul from Thessalonica to Berea. In Thessalonica these enemies of the gospel had succeeded in creating an uproar. Now they pursue Paul to Berea to do the same thing there. And things become so volatile and insecure that we read in v. 14 that *immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea.*

Paul must leave the hot spot – so to speak. But note carefully what follows in that verse. We go on to read that *Silas and Timotheus abode there still.* What a remarkable display of courage that would find Timothy and Silas continuing under such dangerous circumstances to minister to the people of God and build them up in their new found faith. Oh that our sons and daughters would have the courage of their faith to be true to Jesus Christ.

But not only did Timothy possess great courage – but he also possessed the ability to **encourage** the great Apostle Paul in the gospel. In chp. 18 we find Paul departing from Athens and coming to Corinth. Things had not gone all that well at Athens. The puffed up Athenians who prided themselves in their philosophical knowledge had mocked the idea of the resurrection of the dead. The gospel did not have the impact in that city that it had in other cities.

And so Paul departs and comes to Corinth. And when he arrived at Corinth he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and sought to persuade the Jews and the Greeks. But then we read in v. 5 that *when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.*

The arrival the Silas and Timothy re-ignited the flame of devotion in Paul's heart and he boldly pressed forth the claims of Christ. He was encouraged by the arrival of his assistants. There's nothing better for emboldening a man to preach the gospel than to have the support of his brethren who hold to that same gospel. And especially is this the case when we see our sons and daughters espouse the gospel to themselves. Their vitality spurs on those of us who are older and hence, the kingdom of Christ advances.

When the apostle John wrote his first epistle he addressed the young men who were believers and said to them – *I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one* (1Jn. 2:13,14).

We certainly find these character qualities in Timothy. And the desire that dominates our hearts as parents is that our children would be victorious over the world and over sin and that they would be knowledgeable of God's word – that His word would abide in their hearts and transform their lives.

When I think of my own generation and the generation coming up after it how I long for the succeeding generation to do more and to do better than the preceding one. Wouldn't it be great if this upcoming generation of young people would be the ones that would be like that generation in Joshua's day. Their parents died in the wilderness because they didn't possess the faith or the courage to attack the strongholds and take possession of the promised land. But the younger generation in Joshua's day did what their parents wouldn't or couldn't do. They did go in with the confidence that God was with them and God was for them and they were the Lord's people and consequently they were the ones that did great exploits for the Lord.

Oh that the Lord would move in the hearts of our children to make them like that generation of Israelites – or to make them like Timothys that we find in Paul's day. We want them to identify with the doctrines of the gospel the way Timothy is identified with Paul's writings. We want them to have the faith of Timothy. We want them to have the courage of Timothy. We want them to have the ability of Timothy to encourage others in the gospel.

And so we see the potential for God's grace to prevail – and you have a clearer idea now of what I mean when I say to you we must raise our sons and daughters to be Timothys. It remains for us to consider finally how it's done. We must raise our children to be Timothys:

### III. By Realizing the Means for Doing So –

I want us to consider for a moment or two under this heading – the training that Timothy received.

I cited a Barna survey in my introductory remarks which said that parents are ill-equipped for the task of raising their sons and daughters. As I thought again about the matter the question occurred to me – *is it necessary that we become experts in child development in order to raise our children to be Timothys?*

*Must we avail ourselves of the multitudes of books that have been written on this subject? Must we attend the many seminars and training sessions that make child rearing their aim? Must we import into our Sunday School someone who has some form of expertise on this matter?*

And as I look at the references that refer to Timothy's training I've become convinced that the whole matter is really very simple and that there are really just two basics that we must strive to master. One is objective and the other is subjective.

The first one comes from a familiar verse – 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:15 – *And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

In spite of whatever difficulties that would have existed in a mixed home – in spite of the fact that the religion of Timothy's Mother may not have had full sway all of the

time, his God-fearing, Christ-honoring Mother found the time – let me change that – **she made the time to teach her child, Timothy, the Bible.**

I'm reminded of the well known story of John Newton, the converted slave trader who eventually wrote the well known hymn – *Amazing Grace*. It seems that like Timothy, John Newton grew up in a home that was mixed. His mother was a very sickly woman who realized that her time was short. She would die when John was but 7 years old – but before her death she would drill her son in the Scriptures. She taught him to read the Bible and she made him memorize several Bible verses.

After his mother's death – John went to sea with his father and the ungodly environment of life at sea would cause John to forget much of what his mother taught him. I say he forgot – in another sense he didn't forget. As much as he tried to suppress the knowledge of God in his pursuit of sin still the word of God would come back to his mind on occasion to convict him.

He became a drunkard and a profane blasphemer who went from bad to worse. At one point in his life he was so disrespected by all around him that one day in a drunken stupor he fell into the sea while the ship was docked. He was too drunk to swim and would have drowned but such was the contempt in which he was held by the others on his ship that instead of throwing him a life preserver for him to cling to while they would have pulled him up – they instead thrust a harpoon into his back side and hoisted him out of the sea as if they had caught a fish.

But all during his debauched life style he reports in his memoirs that the word of God would come back to him. And one night during a storm at sea he called to God for mercy and he traces his conversion to that time. The efforts of his Mother to teach him the Bible were not in vain. And though it took several years after her death still her efforts brought forth fruit at last and this converted slave trader would testify to the amazing grace of God.

John Newton's example and the example of Timothy teach us the importance of reading the Bible to our children, teaching the Bible to our children, impressing upon them the discipline of memorizing the Scriptures.

We can't control their hearts. They come into this world with depraved hearts and only the Holy Spirit can control and change that. But by instilling the Scriptures into their minds there is a sense in which we are giving the Holy Spirit the very tool He requires in order to work in their hearts to convict them of their sin and convince them of their need of Christ.

This is something that is very basic. It doesn't take a seminary degree or a high level of expertise in the field of child development and psychology. It simply takes the appropriation of a divinely ordained means of grace – the word of God. May we see to it that it can be said of our children what is said of Timothy – *and that from a child thou*

*hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ.*

This is the first basic element we must employ for raising our children to be Timothy's. This is the objective element. The subjective element is given to us in 2<sup>nd</sup> Tim. 1:5 where Paul recalls *the unfeigned faith which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.*

Underscore that phrase ***unfeigned faith***. It means *sincere faith*. You could say that it means *honest faith*. And in this case unfeigned faith is something that must be conveyed to our children by example. This poses a challenge to parents – *can your children tell that you walk by faith?*

We know that our children will see our imperfections. We know that they'll figure out eventually if they don't know it already – that we are not perfectly consistent in our religion. We have not attained holiness to the degree that we ought. We are all too often plagued by our own worldliness and carnality. It may seem to our children that the rules and standards seem to be ever shifting.

But you see – the great advantage to *unfeigned faith* is that you don't have to make believe that you are something that you are not. We are, at the end of the day, sinners saved by grace. And we possess two natures – the new nature and the carnal nature and these are contrary the one to the other – as Paul tells us in Galatians. And so we fight against the world and the flesh and we experience both victories and defeats.

And what is so wonderful about our faith in God's salvation by grace is that when we stumble or when we have lapses in our spirituality we don't try to cover them over or excuse them or make believe that we're not responsible for them – in the simplicity of God's provision in Christ we plead the blood against our sins and shortcomings and inconsistencies and then we press on in our walk with the Lord.

Your children don't have to see sinless perfection in you. And it's a good thing because they won't see it. But they do need to see you manifesting unfeigned faith – which means that they can tell that you believe in Jesus Christ. They can tell that you have the desire to serve Christ. They can tell that you love the ways that are pleasing to Christ and that you strive to overcome the things that are displeasing to Christ.

**Conclusion** – And so we see the potential for our children to be Timothy's. God's grace can and will prevail in our homes. We know why we want our children to be Timothy's. We want them to have faith in Christ. We want them to develop biblical convictions and then have the courage of those convictions. We want to see them set their priorities right so no matter what they do in life their highest priority will be the advancement of the gospel of Christ. How can we accomplish this? We must train them in the Scriptures and we must walk before them with unfeigned faith. And in so doing we can expect that however bumpy the road may become in their development they will in the end come forth as trophies of God's grace – just like Timothy.