

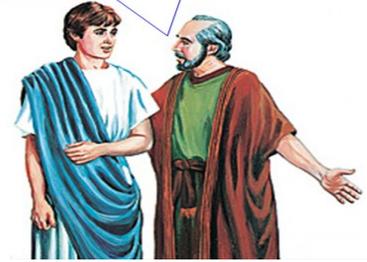
## BE AN EXAMPLE TO THE BELIEVERS

1 Timothy 4:12

### Introduction

1. Paul admonished Timothy, saying, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).
2. What I’d like to do in this lesson is consider (i) in what Timothy was to be an example, (ii) the purpose and impact of his example on all Christians, and, (iii) make application to those who lead in positions of authority (i.e., presiding, preaching, teaching, etc.).

Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.



### I. ABOUT TIMOTHY

#### A. A few facts about Timothy:

- He was born sometime between A.D. 25 and 30.
- He was born in a mixed marriage - his father was Greek and his mother a Jew (Acts 16:1; 2 Timothy 1:5).
- His name means “honored of God”.
- His grandmother Lois and mother Eunice taught him the scriptures from his youth (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15).
- He was not circumcised at eight days old, which was probably due to his father being Greek (Acts 16:1).
- He was a native of Lystra (Acts 16:1).
- He was a faithful Christian and well spoken of by the brethren (Acts 16:2).

#### B. Timothy’s conversion and work:

1. Timothy was likely converted by Paul on his first missionary journey. We say this because (i) Paul preached the gospel in Lystra on his first missionary journey and so it is likely that Timothy was converted at that time (Acts 13:1-14:20), (ii) When Paul returned to Lystra on his second missionary journey, Timothy is called a “disciple” (Acts 16:1). One might object to this reasoning but consider, too, that (iii) Paul refers to Timothy as his “son in the faith” (1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2), which could mean that Paul had begotten him through his preaching.
2. Paul had great confidence in him and spoke highly of him (1 Corinthians 16:10-11; Philippians 2:19-24). He was an evangelist (2 Timothy 5:5) and was given great responsibilities: he was left at churches to help establish and build them up, and to ensure that they adhered to sound doctrine. Notice some of his responsibilities:
  - a. Charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies (1 Timothy 1:3-4; 2 Timothy 2:14-16, 23).
  - b. Teach regarding the roles of men and women in public worship (1 Timothy 2:1-15).
  - c. Ensure that only qualified men were appointed as elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3:1-13).
  - d. Instruct the brethren regarding false and sound doctrine (1 Timothy 4:1-11).
  - e. Give attention to public reading of scripture, exhortation, and doctrine (1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:2).
  - f. Make sure the brethren fulfilled their corporate and individual responsibilities in matters of benevolence (1 Timothy 5:3-16).
  - g. Train others to be preachers and teachers (2 Timothy 2:2).

“These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:14-15).

## II. BE AN EXAMPLE

### A. The importance of being an example:

1. You cannot expect others to follow your teaching when you do not abide by it yourself - It's hypocritical! Paul wrote, "Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, Do not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?" (**Romans 2:17-23**). The effect of such hypocrisy? "For 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you'..." (**Romans 2:24**). Such hypocritical conduct leads people to speak against religion and speak evil of God.
2. "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (**Matthew 23:11**). Jesus didn't just teach it, He set the example: shortly before Jesus departed this world, He washed His disciples' feet (**John 13:1-11**). "So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (**John 13:12-15**).
3. Paul begins the letter to the Philippians, "Paul and Timothy..." (**Philippians 1:1**). Later, Paul exhorts his brethren to "become fellow-imitators of me, and watch those who so walk, just as ye have us for an example" (**Philippians 3:17**). The "us" referring to himself and Timothy. He would, of course, qualify this by saying, "...just as I also imitate Christ" (**1 Corinthians 11:1**).

### B. We come now to Paul's admonition to Timothy:

1. It would, of course, be hypocritical for Timothy to teach his brethren the doctrine of Christ and exhort them to live a life of holiness and yet fail to do so himself. Thus he admonishes him, saying, "Let no one despise your youth, but **be an example** to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (**1 Timothy 4:12**).
2. In what is Timothy to be an example?
  - a. Word. This refers to his preaching (**2 Timothy 1:13**; cp. **Titus 2:1, 7**) and personal conversation (cp. **Ephesians 4:29**; **5:3-4**). It is speech that reveals the thoughts of the heart and one's true character (**Mark 7:20-23**; cp. **Matthew 12:37**; **Proverbs 17:28**).
  - b. Conduct. This refers to the whole round of his public life (**James 3:13**; **1 Peter 1:15, 17**; **2:11-12**). It includes such things as the company one keeps (**2 Corinthians 6:14**) and the places one goes (**Proverbs 4:14-15**), interactions and dealings with people, deportment, orderliness and punctuality (**1 Corinthians 14:40**).
  - c. Love. This refers to his love for God, which is expressed in keeping the Lord's commandments (**John 14:15**; **1 John 5:3**), love for brethren, which may be expressed in providing for physical needs (**John 13:34**; **James 2:15-16**; **1 John 3:17**; **4:20**), love for neighbor (**Matthew 22:39**), and love for enemies (**Matthew 5:44**).
  - d. Spirit. This refers to the government of his passions (**Galatians 5:22-23**; **2 Peter 1:5-6**; **Colossians 3:5**; **Proverbs 17:27**; **25:28**); he is to be of a meek (**Colossians 3:12**; **James 3:13**), and forgiving disposition (**Ephesians 4:32**; **Colossians 3:13**).
  - e. Faith. This refers to his confidence in God that ought to be consistently seen in all situations and circumstances (**1 Timothy 6:12**; **1 Corinthians 16:13**; **Ephesians 6:16**; **Colossians 1:23**; **1 Thessalonians 5:8**). Genuine faith always expresses itself through works (**James 2:18**).
  - f. Purity. This refers to his motives, thoughts, speech, and conduct. His motive ought to be to please the Lord (**2 Corinthians 5:9**) and, as Paul says, "Let all that you do be done with love" (**1 Corinthians 16:14**).

### III. THE PURPOSE OF BEING AN EXAMPLE

A. Timothy is exhorted to be an *example* in speech, conduct, love, spirit, faith, and purity...

1. This doesn't mean that everyone else is to regard themselves as a spectator whose job it is to find some fault with him: "Ah ha! We've found a fault with you! You're no example to anyone; you ought to practice what you preach. Maybe you shouldn't be preaching".
2. Timothy was to be an example for others to imitate.
  - a. Jesus washed His disciples' feet, saying, "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15).
  - b. Paul exhorted the Philippians, saying, "Brethren, join in following my example..." (Philippians 3:17).
  - c. To the Thessalonians, Paul says, "For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us" (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9).
  - d. Paul urged the Corinthians to "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Paul told Timothy to be an example to the believers for believers to follow or imitate.

B. It should be clear, then, that God expects *every* Christian to be an example; each one of us must become an example for one another in regards to our speech (Ephesians 4:29), conduct (James 3:13; 1 Peter 1:15, 17; 2:11-12), love for God and man (Matthew 22:37-40), control of passions (1 Corinthians 9:24-27), faith (James 2:18), and purity (2 Corinthians 7:1).

#### Conclusion

1. It is essential for those who lead the congregation – whether presiding, preaching, teaching, praying, or reading the scriptures – to “be an example to the believers” in (i) faithful attendance whenever the church meets, (ii) remaining for the whole service, (iii) arriving on time, (iv) dressing appropriately (v) participating in the business and work of the church. That this is especially true of those in positions of authority is seen in the qualifications of elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3:1-13) and in Paul’s admonition to Timothy (1 Timothy 4:12) and Titus (Titus 2:6-8). Paul charges every congregation, saying, “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40).
2. But whether we are in a position of authority or leadership or not, each one of us is responsible to set an example to one another in faithful attendance (Acts 20:7; Hebrews 10:24-25), speech (Colossians 4:6), punctuality (Proverbs 12:24<sup>1</sup>), love (Romans 12:15; 1 Peter 1:22), conduct (2 Peter 3:11), faith (2 Corinthians 8:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:3), purity (1 John 3:3), good works (Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:6-7), etc. Each one of us must take some responsibility to ensure that all things are done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40).

“Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40).  
It is the responsibility of those in positions of authority and leadership to ensure that all things are done decently and in order.

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, we are all late from time-to-time due to no fault of our own. Here, though, we have in mind those who are habitually late due to a lack of planning or laziness, and this is why I have cited this proverb.