

# The life and culture of true sons in the faith

Bruce Mackay

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## The four foundations

During this current season, the Lord has focused our attention toward the four foundations of church life. These are essential for our participation as members of the body of Christ and maturity as sons in the faith: the apostles' doctrine, the apostles' fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer. Act 2:42. In his first letter, John explained that our participation in these foundations is a participation in fellowship with the presbytery, whose fellowship is with the Father and the Son. 1Jn 1:1-3.

In this paper, we will focus on the relational nature of this fellowship by considering the life of Timothy, as one who demonstrated the life and culture of 'a true son in the faith'. 1Ti 1:2. In fact, Paul also called Timothy 'my son'. 2Ti 2:1. Paul was able to say this of Timothy because Timothy had developed a genuine fellowship with the presbytery which impacted upon every aspect of Timothy's life and culture. Paul wrote to him, 'But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me'. 2Ti 3:10-11.

## Timothy's early years

As a child, Timothy had been trained by his grandmother and mother in the Scriptures, making him wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 2Ti 1:5. 2Ti 3:15. In making reference to this, Paul must have known the joy of seeing this family turn to faith in Christ. This would have occurred when he and Barnabas proclaimed the gospel of sonship in the synagogues of the region of Lycaonia. Act 14.

Timothy had observed how his grandmother and mother fellowshiped with Paul and Barnabas. Paul had clearly known and remembered their faith and fellowship. 2Ti 1:5. These women set an example to Timothy of how to relate and grow in discipleship and faith as sons of God. Believing parents should be encouraged by this account, realising the precious fruit that this fellowship can produce.

As a young man, Timothy continued as a disciple and was well spoken of by the brethren in the churches at Lystra and Iconium. When Paul visited these churches to strengthen the disciples there, clearly Timothy stood out as a young man of offering. Act 16:1-2. It is here that we see Timothy's development as a true son in the faith. The following event demonstrated his relationship with, and trust in, Paul and the presbytery.

'Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.' Act 16:1-3.

Being a Greek, Timothy's father had never circumcised Timothy. This was no issue for Timothy, as Paul had proclaimed that physical circumcision availed nothing in regard to faith in Christ. Paul had also resisted those who required believing Gentiles to be circumcised. Despite this, for the sake of the gospel being effective, Paul circumcised Timothy. We note Timothy's trust, as he did not resist or argue that this action appeared to be hypocritical but, rather, submitted to and obeyed Paul.

Our lack of trust in the presbytery is sometimes exposed when we observe what we imagine to be an inconsistency on the part of other brethren, particularly among the presbytery. We must not judge in this way. There was no hypocrisy with Paul. His life was laid down as an offering, and he was willing to do whatever was required – except to sin – for the sake of the gospel.

### **My true son in the faith**

It is important to note that, as it was when Paul called Timothy his ‘true son in the faith’, all true sonship is sourced in Christ, the Son of God. Therefore, a true son in the faith is a son of God who is fully joined to Christ the Son, and is in the Son. In life’s journey, a true son in the faith joins every event of every day to the wounds of Christ, and lives by the faith of the Son. This was the testimony of Timothy. Timothy had observed and learned this from Paul. 2Ti 1:8-12.

Jesus said that sons of the heavenly Father will love their enemies, bless those who curse them, do good to those who hate them, and pray for those who spitefully use them and persecute them. Mat 5:44-45. Paul instructed Timothy in the words of Jesus.

To further understand ‘a true son in the faith’, we note that the book of Hebrews differentiates between a true son and an illegitimate son. Heb 12:7-8. A true son is one who has endured and not despised the chastening of the heavenly Father. This was true of Timothy. 2Ti 2:1-7. 2Ti 3:10-15.

When Paul called Timothy ‘my son’, we are left in no doubt that Paul regarded Timothy as a son of the presbytery. He recounted that the presbytery had laid hands on Timothy. 1Ti 4:14. We know that Paul was a member of this presbytery because, in another statement, he clearly recalled ‘the laying on of *my hands*.’ 2Ti 1:6.

Here is a precious insight into being a true son in the faith. In proclaiming the word of present truth, the presbytery is laying hold of sons of God. A true son of God chooses to trust his life into the hands of Christ’s administration, the presbytery. The fruit of this relationship is that it can be said of such ones, ‘You have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me.’ 2Ti 3:10-11.

This description was not unique just to Timothy because of his ministry grace. This is to be true for *every* son of God. The word calls us all who are joined to the Lord to be one spirit with Him, for we ‘have all been made to drink into one Spirit’. 1Co 6:17. 1Co 12:13. Eph 2:18. Eph 4:4.

Paul wrote to the Philippian congregation, encouraging them to stand fast in one Spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. Php 1:27. He noted the need to be of one mind. Paul equated being one Spirit with the Lord as being of one mind with the presbytery.

Yet, not all choose such a relationship. Paul recalled Timothy as such a person, as he was like-minded with Paul. To be a true son in the faith is to be of one mind and heart with the word, direction, focus, culture and attitude of the presbytery. Paul made the point that those who are not one with the presbytery are not true sons, because they seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. Php 2:19-22.

### **The culture of a true son in the faith**

Timothy carefully followed Paul’s ‘manner of life’. If we receive the doctrine taught by the presbytery, we also must live according to the culture that we observe from fathers in the

faith. 2Ti 3:10-11. The two books of Timothy teach clear points regarding our culture as true sons in the faith and how we are to conduct ourselves.

*How to conduct ourselves in the house of God. 1Ti 3:15.*

The church of the living God is 'the pillar and ground of the truth'. We know that the truth flows from the four foundations: the apostles' doctrine, the apostles' fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer. These are the foundations from which the truth of God is known, and is the foundation of our whole Christian life as a son in the faith. In other words, the word of present truth is the word by which we live and relate in our marriages, at home with our families, at work and in our businesses, along with all our recreational activities.

The fellowship that we have with our brethren, flowing from the present truth word, will affect every decision we make. There is to be no other culture of relating and decision-making. We find the mind of Christ when we fellowship in the apostles' doctrine.

'The breaking of bread' is not just an occasion that we dress up for, while putting on a good showing in the flesh. As we change back into our house clothes, we don't change back into our familiar culture. Our life is an offering poured out on the saints in our homes and in our places of employment, study and recreation. This is the culture of our households. We are to be always living by fellowship and participation in Christ's body and blood.

Prayer should underpin our culture. Paul said to Timothy, 'Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.' 1Ti 2:1. Men are to do this by lifting up holy hands without anger and doubting. 1Ti 2:8. Men, one of the reasons why we are not immersed in a culture of prayer is because our head is 'covered'. We have not walked in the light of fellowship or confessed our faults, and we still have anger in our attitudes. We do not need to live this way. We can fellowship in the offering of Christ and participate in the fellowship of the Father and Son.

In like manner, concerning prayer, women can be hindered because they are giving attention to their outward appearance; and, due to their anxiety, can be easily deceived. Women, your prayers will be heard if your spirit is silent and you continue in faith, love and holiness, with self-control. 2Ti 2:9-15.

*Relate and honour with all purity in the church among all age groups, including widows and elders. 1Ti 5.*

We are to exhort older men as fathers. This is to be learned when we are young children. Honour and respect should be expressed when we speak to those who are older. We don't address them as though they are our peers. They are to be honoured. Likewise, older women are to be respected as mothers.

We are not to have a condescending attitude toward the younger men. We relate with and respect them as brothers. The younger women must be treated as sisters. Our relationships are to be conducted with purity. If we adhere to such a culture, young men and women will approach marriage 'in honour'.

When young men and women relate as brothers and sisters in all purity, they meet in the truth of who they are as sons of God. They put off their fallen modes. A young man is not to conquer a young lady. Neither is a woman to present, in her own image, a mode that ensnares a man by her flirtatious ways. Nor is she to be like Eve after she ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, trying to be like God while in the flesh. These modes are false and only lead to unsanctified relationships that bring grief.

One of the other areas to which Paul calls true sons in the faith is to know how to care for widows. Without covering this topic in detail, Paul was clear that the culture in the house of

God is that believing children care for their widowed mother. This is good and acceptable before God. It is not good and acceptable before God for aging parents to be caring for their children so that their children can grow rich, and live self-centred lives. For sons of God to neglect this care of provision and accountability is to deny the faith, and to be worse than an unbeliever. 1Ti 5:4-8,16.

*Work as an employee and be an employer as to the Lord. 1Ti 6:1-2.*

A son of God will serve their employer in the same manner as they serve the Lord. We are to count our employers worthy of all honour, regardless of whether they are believers or unbelievers. In writing to the Ephesians, Paul said, 'Be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men.' Eph 6:5-7. By having a worldly attitude toward our employer, the name of God and His doctrine is blasphemed. The believing employer is to be of the same attitude as the believing employee, showing no partiality. Eph 6:9.

*Live by the words of the Lord Jesus and His doctrine, which produces godliness, not being drawn into disputes and arguments. 1Ti 6:3-5.*

Sons in the faith live and speak the word of God. Our culture is not to give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes and debates. 1Ti 1:4. We are to be those who enable godly edification which is in faith, not being involved in useless arguments or being puffed up with knowledge.

*Live in godly contentment, knowing how to handle finances and the danger of riches if we are not rich in good works. 1Ti 6:6-10. 1Ti 6:17-19.*

A true son in the faith has learned that godliness with contentment is great gain. They will put no trust in riches, as the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, causing some to stray from the faith.

Let us hear the word of the Lord on this. 'But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.' 1Ti 6:9-10.

'Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.' 1Ti 6:17-19.

### **The evident testimony of a true son in the faith connected to the presbytery**

Every true son in the faith has a testimony that expresses the fruit of a life that is joined to the presbytery. This will be evident to all. 1Ti 4:15. This fruit was evident in Timothy.

*Timothy demonstrated love from a pure heart*

Love 'from a pure heart' is love without partiality and judgement. Our love will be 'from a good conscience'. 1Ti 1:5. With our conscience cleansed from dead works, we are able to serve God in what is pleasing to Him, along with serving one another honourably. Love 'from sincere faith' is by the faith of the Son, which is without hypocrisy. 1Ti 1:5.

### *Timothy functioned according to name and grace*

This becomes evident when we are true to the word proclaimed by presbytery messengers. Without this, there is striving with projection. We come to peace and rest when we are hearing from outside ourselves. Without doubt, we can give ourselves entirely to the command that we have been given. 1Ti 4:14-15. Note the promise to the church of Pergamos: 'To him who overcomes ... I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.' Rev 2:17. We will overcome and receive our name when we have an ear to hear what the word of the presbytery is toward us.

We will know how to take heed to ourselves because we are living according to sound doctrine. This will be to the salvation of our soul; and the testimony of this way of living will also save those to whom we relate. 1Ti 4:15-16.

### *Timothy was able to be delivered from his propensity to be timid*

By a word from Paul, a presbytery messenger, Timothy could receive that word. By the faith that comes by hearing the word, he could live by that word, set free from fear and anxiety. 2Ti 1:7.

The evidence of living in relationship with the presbytery is our ability to trust. We no longer trust in ourselves, in the past or in our possessions and achievements. That would be misplaced trust. When we have relational trust, we receive the word of God not as a word from man, but as it is in truth, the word of God. Therefore, our trust is in the living God and His command, which then works effectively in us. This enables us to labour in love, patience and hope while suffering reproach. 1Ti 4:9-10. 1Th 1:3. 1Th 2:13.

### **Overcoming in these perilous latter days**

We need to know that these are the last days and that we are living in perilous times. 2Ti 3:1. It is important that we have repented of every other gospel. Only the gospel of sonship that joins us to Christ's death will keep us in these last days. It is only by participation in Christ's offering and sufferings that we will overcome the flesh, the world and Satan, and be found blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing. 1Ti 6:14.

We are to be 'poured out as a drink offering in order' to fight the good fight of faith. As we look to His appearing, we flee all that is temporal and passing away. We are to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. By this, we wage a good warfare and lay hold of eternal life. No-one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life. 2Ti 2:4. These ones will keep the faith and be preserved for His heavenly kingdom. 2Ti 4:18.

Paul gives a sober warning that those who do not have such a testimony and good confession will depart from the faith, and will suffer shipwreck. 1Ti 1:19. 1Ti 4:1.

Beloved brethren, will we be encouraged and exhorted to give heed to our relational fellowship with the presbytery, so that our testimony will be evident to all that we are indeed true sons in the faith?