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KEY TO SUCCESS FOR THE YOUNG AFRICAN PASTOR

By Samuel Ngewa

Youth is full of strength and new ideas. Age is full of experience and established tradition. More often than not the two conflict rather than compliment each other. There is an awareness that the continued growth of the church in Africa will come as a result of complimenting each other and not conflicting with each other. Yet conflict is still a more common phenomenon than compliment. Some have argued that the problem cannot be solved because there will always be a generation gap. However, it does look to me like the Scriptures take the position that this can be overcome with the result that the young man becomes influential even in the midst of older people. The writer recognizes that the problem is shared by both the older and the younger generations but what he intends to do in this article is to address himself to the responsibility of the young in solving this problem. The procedure will be to exegetically examine one of the key passages speaking to the young pastor on being successful. Success will be dealt with in two categories, namely, 1) success in getting the respect of the older generation, and 2) success in accomplishing the task of the pastor.

1. Success in getting the respect of the older generation.

In about A.D. 63, Paul was concerned about the ministry of the young man, Timothy, at Ephesus. In 1 Timothy 4:12 he gives Timothy certain exhortations which will help him to gain respect in the eyes of the older people without which his ministry to them will not be far reaching.

Timothy was serving in a church with all ages — the aged men and women, young men and young women (1 Timothy 5:1, 2). He needed the respect of all the ages for his ministry to be effective. But he was young. The Greek word translated young is *neotetos* and in the Hellenistic context covered the age of military service which was up to forty years.¹ Timothy must have by this time been over thirty years of age.² He, however, was still a young man in the eyes of the aged men and women. It would have been possible for Timothy to let the fact that he was a young man be an hindrance to his effectiveness in the ministry. Paul's exhortation is to the contrary: "Let no one look down upon you because you are young." Paul uses the word *kataproneito* which is in the present and active imperative. The exhortation assumes that it is within Timothy's capabilities to continually let no one

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look down upon him on the basis of his youth. In other words Paul is telling Timothy that he must always make himself the object of respect rather than mockery even though his age may be an hindrance to that.

What a fitting exhortation in our African context where age is a primary issue in being accepted as a leader!

The question is, how would Timothy achieve the goal of letting no one despise him on the grounds of his youthfulness? Paul spells this out in very clear words. He says, "Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in faith and in purity."

Paul uses the Greek word *ginou* (set) which is in the present middle imperative. Timothy is to make it his practice or habit to set an example. The word example is in translation *typos* which means a model or pattern. The words "for the believers" are in the genitive case in the Greek (*toypiston*) and not in the dative. Timothy is thus not to be merely an example to believers (which would be the force of the dative – of I Thess. 1:7, II Thess. 3:9, Titus 2:7) but a model of what believers are. As P. H. Liddon says, Timothy's life is to be a pattern of what believers become when they follow the Christian ideal.³ In other words Timothy is to be a believer with all the believer's qualities. At times we hear people talk of an individual as a Christian, not meaning that the individual said he accepted Christ or goes to church but because upon examination they see in him those qualities of what characterizes a Christian. This Timothy is to be, not for the sake of others to see and follow although that is included in the genitive, but because it is what he should be as a believer. Being that kind of person will so overwhelm those who see him that they will forget his youth and hold him in a place of respect. He is to be this model in five specific areas:

a. In speech (*en logo*) – This included all the words which come out of Timothy's mouth, whether speaking to one person or a group – an old man, old woman, young man or young woman. When his words are put to the test they should always be found to be words which the believer be expected to speak. This does not give conditions or situations as the determining factors as to the kind of words he will speak. His speech is to be unconditioned believer's words. It covers all of his life. Kelly rightly says that this refers to Timothy's "day to day conversation, including both personal conversation and public teaching."⁴

b. In life (*en anastrophe*) – This has reference to one's life, behavior and conduct. His conduct is to be such that it exemplifies those qualities which characterize those who are believers.

c. In love (*en agape*) – In the New Testament, this love described as *agape* in Greek, is used in a number of ways: It is used of 1) love of man to man, and especially the love of Christians towards Christians (see Galatians 6:5, I Timothy 1:5), 2) love of man toward God (see I John 2:5), 3) love of God towards man (see John 5:10), 4) love of God the Father for the Son (see John 3:35) and 5) love of Christ towards man (see II Corinthians 5:14,

Ephesians 3:19). In this particular context, it is Timothy who is to exercise it and therefore the love to God (no. 2 above) and the love to man (no. 1 above). According to the New Testament, though, these two are inseparable. Without love towards God, love towards man is impossible and love towards man is a reflection of love towards God. Hiebert calls this kind of love “the fraternal charity in the full Christian sense in which case it relates to both loving God as well as loving men.”⁵

Our love towards God will affect our love towards men and our love towards men will directly affect our influence in the ministry.

d. In faith (*en pistei*) — As Kelly says, *pistei* in this context has a passive sense of faithfulness or trustworthiness.⁶ Timothy is to be one in whom people can exercise faith and trust. This may relate to matters of speech or matters of conduct. He is to be faithful and trustworthy not only in big matters of life like public speaking but also small matters like private conversation. Many times we hear of testimonies of some people by others expressed in the words: “Such and such a person cannot do such a thing.” This is in itself a sufficient defense in the midst of false accusation. This defense, however, is not easily achieved. It is founded on trust and faith which you have led people to put in you by being found faithful and trustworthy. This quality is not related to age. Timothy can have it, even being a young man.

e. In purity (*en agneia*) — In the word *agneia* is contained the idea of sinlessness of life.⁷ It covers innocence and integrity of heart.⁸ It includes purity of act and thought.⁹ It thus does not only cover the things which man can see, namely acts, but also those which only God can see, namely the meditations of the heart and the thoughts of the mind. While man may not see these, usually they will eventually show in action.

The exhortation is that Timothy must have pure thoughts about his congregation, old and young people alike. He is to have holy meditations about everyone and this will be evident in his character and speech as he relates to them.

In summary, Timothy is to be a man who is a lover of God and man — setting an example in matters of speech, life, conduct, love, faith and purity. He is to be a faithful man both in the eyes of God and in the judgement of men. He is to be a man who is pure both in act and thought. This will result not only in God’s blessing on his ministry but also in gaining honour and respect from the people, even though he is a young man. He who is an honoured and respected man because of his sincere relationships with God and man will be a successful pastor, regardless of his age.

2. Success in accomplishing the task.

We should, however, not be left with the impression that Paul is saying, “Just live an exemplary life of what a believer is and your ministry will blossom with fruitfulness.” Paul further says that Timothy must faithfully

do the work of teaching and applying doctrine to the lives of others. Paul does not systematically expound the doctrine to Timothy. He did not need to do so because Timothy must have known it already, having been a companion of Paul. Timothy was quite like some of us who in one way or another have enjoyed the learning of the Scriptures, whether in Bible school or Bible college or Bible class or even in a Theological Education by extension class. But Timothy needed a reminder that he must teach the doctrine applying it to the lives of those he is ministering to. Paul tells Timothy, "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching" (1 Timothy 4:13). The two words, preaching (*paraklessei*) and teaching (*didaskalia*) do not have an emphasized difference. Fairbairn says, "To try to distinguish exactly between the preaching and the teaching is superfluous, except that, from the impact of the terms, the one may be supposed to have had respect more especially to practice and the other to instruction."¹⁰ Elliott argues on the same line saying that "both appear to mark a form of public address, the former (preaching) directed to the feelings and application founded on some passages of Scripture while the latter (teaching) is more to the understanding of the hearers, perhaps to the distinction between a sermon and a lecture."¹¹ Teaching stresses factual content. The truths of the Scripture must be known. This is only possible through exegetical study of Scripture. Yet the content though known from A to Z would be of little significance if we do not answer the question: "So what does it mean to me?" The feelings must not be left untouched by our preaching. Our ministry of the Word of God must be applied ministry. Thus, factual content must be accompanied by application to life. Our application of Scriptures to life must also be founded on factual content. It is only then that we communicate God's message to man; otherwise we communicate our message. An appeal to the feelings must be founded on a mental grasp of the truths of God. We do not only need to be full of charisma but also full of factual content in order to have a successful, long-living ministry.

As pertains to both the exemplary life and faithful teaching and preaching ministry, Paul instructs Timothy to be diligent — giving himself wholly to them, watching them and persevering in them. The first two (i.e. diligence and total commitment to both exemplary life and faithful teaching and preaching) are to be such that his progress in good living and proper teaching will be noticed by everyone. It must be a growing experience. The thought of people noticing Timothy's progress is tied together with Timothy being an example for the believers. He is to be a pattern, or example and he can achieve this only if his progress is noticeable. Timothy is to guide others to the Christian ideal by the witness of his life and commitment to the ministry of the Word. The last two (watching and persevering) are tied together with the reason: "Because if you do so, you will save both yourself and your hearers." Surely the salvation which Paul is

talking about here is not justification, for Timothy must have gone through that already. A commonly suggested interpretation is that this is a reminiscence of Paul's fear in I Corinthians 9:27, "so that after I have preached to others, I, myself will not be disqualified for the prize."¹² Even this interpretation is not quite fitting an explanation because I Corinthians 9:27 talks about Paul being disqualified for the prize while the present passage talks about Timothy's salvation. A more fitting interpretation is one that takes into consideration the main purpose behind the epistle. Paul did not write the epistle primarily to instruct Timothy how to be justified or how to keep himself from being disqualified at the end. He wrote mainly to instruct him on how to carry out the ministry at Ephesus. One aspect of Timothy's ministry was to deal with false teachers who were not only teaching false doctrine but also living immoral lives. It is salvation from these false teachers and the leaven of their teaching that is in question here. If Timothy keeps a good watch on, and perseveres in holy living and reading, teaching and preaching pure doctrine, he will not only keep himself from being polluted by the false teaching but he will also help those whom he teaches from being polluted. He will be a successful pastor.

In this passage (I Timothy 4:12–16) therefore, Paul lays the emphasis on the importance of both good works and doctrine. Timothy is to be engaged not only in living a holy life, above reproach, but also in teaching and preaching sound doctrine. It is by means of doing this, and the pattern he presents, that he will be assured of not being led astray by those who teach otherwise, and saving others also. Those who do notice progress in both spirituality and commitment to the gospel will be pulled to the Christian ideal by his witness. Those who hear in him preach and teach will know and abide by the truth. It is not going to be an easy task and therefore Timothy must be diligent, giving himself wholly to it, to watch persevere.

What then would we who are young African pastors learn from this passage? Note especially that:

1. Even within a culture in which the older you are the more likely you will be accepted by either a local congregation or denomination, or vice versa, it is possible for a young man to be successful, respected and influential. This, however comes by living such a life that the youthfulness gets out of the picture. This can be done by:

- a) Being an example of what believers are in your speech — being full of love for God and man, faithfulness as we are examined by others and purity in act and thought.
- b) Being an example of what believers are in our conduct — full of love, faithfulness and purity.
- c) Committing ourselves to faithful preaching and teaching of the Scripture.

2. Even while serving within a world in which false teaching is all around

us (and remember that there is an increasing flow of this into Africa) we can be successful in faithfully preaching and teaching sound doctrines.

The key to this success is keeping on the alert (watching the cunningness of false teachers – not to find you unawares) and PERSEVERING IN THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL. Some of us as African theologians, are on the move to contextualize our theology for our own people. Within this exercise we must be on the alert and clearly discern what is factual content from Scripture and what is mere feelings without factual support from Scripture. We must persevere in that which is the truth of the Gospel. Persevering in the fundamentals of the Christian faith, even as handed down to us by our Christian African fore-fathers is not a sign of mental weakness but spiritual strength built on Scriptural facts.

We may conclude, therefore, with the saying, "Let he who is a young African pastor meditate not on how young he is but on how to be a Christian in practise and a faithful teacher/preacher of the Word." This is the key to success.

Footnotes

1. H. P. Liddon, *Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's First Epistle To Timothy* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1897), p. 45. See also B. S. Easton, *The Pastoral Epistles: Introduction, translation, Commentary and Word Studies* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1947), p. 146.
2. In his book, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954) p.21, E. K. Simpson argues that Timothy was by now between thirty and forty years of age.
3. H. P.. Liddon, *Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's First Epistle To Timothy* p. 46.
4. J. N. D. Kelly *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1963) p. 158.
5. E. D. Hiebert, *First Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957) p. 85.
6. J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on The Pastoral Epistles* p. 104
7. J. H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962) p. 1.
8. J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on The Pastoral Epistles* p. 104.
9. W. Lock, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1966) p. 53
10. P. Fairbairn, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956) p. 188
11. C. J. Elliott, *The Pastoral Epistles* p. 64
12. See E. F. Scott, *The Pastoral Epistles* (New York: Harper and Bros., n. d.) p. 54 and J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, p. 109.