

## 2 TIMOTHY 1:13

### THE PATTERN OF SOUND WORDS

“Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”<sup>1</sup>

**S**eminarians are required to study systematic theology. The required courses consist of in-depth studies of the several doctrines that define the Faith of Christ the Lord. On my computer, I have over fifty systematic theologies available to me for my studies, and perhaps as many as three hundred texts presenting various studies of particular theologies. Obviously, I believe that theology is important to understanding the Christian Faith, if not to all who preach the Word, then assuredly to me. I would argue that an understanding of biblical truth is essential for anyone who wishes to teach the Word of God.

However, no one should think that the Bible is a textbook of systematic theology. Similarly, though Paul was a doctrinal preacher, he did not leave us a systematic theology as such. Writing Timothy, the Apostle to the Gentiles wrote in expansive terms; and many of his letters that we have received likewise reveal that he painted with a broad brush. This does not mean that we are left to wonder what is true and what is errant; it does mean that we are responsible to consider the entirety of his writing to understand the truths he revealed.

Neither Paul nor any of the men who gave us the Scriptures wrote out of the bounty of their imagination. As Peter states in the second letter drafted to the believers in the Diaspora, “We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” [2 PETER 1:16-21].

The affirmation concerning the origin of Scripture seems to me somewhat dry, even pedestrian. Many contemporary translations have sought to capture the fire spilling out as Peter wrote. I refer to one example of the pertinent verses from a recent translation. “When we apostles told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, we didn’t base our message on clever myths that we made up. Rather, we witnessed his majesty with our own eyes... First, you must understand this: No prophecy in Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation. No prophecy ever originated from humans. Instead, it was given by the Holy Spirit as humans spoke under God’s direction” [2 PETER 1:16, 20, 21 GOD’S WORD].<sup>2</sup> Scripture was not invented out of the fertile imaginations of mere men. The testimony of those who wrote was that the Spirit of God directed them to put His words into written form. The Spirit of God superintended those who wrote Scripture so that we have precisely what He meant us to have.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> **GOD’S WORD Translation** (Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, MI 1995)

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It is not travelling too far afield to raise the question of whether Paul knew he was writing Scripture as he wrote this letter; exploring the question will be beneficial, a source of encouragement for us as believers, confirming that what has been written is the Word of the True and Living God. In a sense the question is moot—the writings are inspired of God; and I don't want us to get lost in the weeds pursuing what some may consider mere academic trivia. Nevertheless, the matter is of sufficient interest to merit a brief consideration. Peter makes the case that ignorant and unstable individuals twist Paul's writings "to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures" [2 PETER 3:16]. Peter equates Paul's writings with the remainder of Scripture, and he says that twisting these Scriptures leads to destruction, presumably personal destruction, though it perhaps encompasses congregational destruction. The point is that Peter recognised that what Paul had written was of a divine nature and to be received as Scripture.

More specifically, Paul claimed that what he wrote in the First Corinthian Letter were "commandments of the Lord" [see 1 CORINTHIANS 14:36, 37]. Since these particular commandments are not written elsewhere, it follows that Paul was claiming to have received these commandments directly from the Lord. It is reasonable to conclude that he would have known that God was guiding him and directing him as he wrote them down.

In what is arguably the first of the letters bearing his name to have been included in the canon of Scripture, Paul stated that what he delivered to the Thessalonians, and presumably to other congregations, was the "Word of God" [see 1 THESSALONIANS 2:13]. The Apostle pens a strong statement concerning those who do not obey what he wrote in his second letter to these same Thessalonians [see 2 THESSALONIANS 3:14]. Professor R. Laird Harris makes the strong point that in 2 CORINTHIANS 2, "in defense of his ministry, Paul declared that he spoke 'in demonstration of the Spirit' (v. 4), speaking 'the wisdom of God' (v. 7), as revealed to him 'by his Spirit' (v. 10). He knew the things of God so revealed (v. 12), and he spoke them not in man's words, but in words 'which the Holy Ghost teacheth' him (v. 13)."<sup>3</sup> I note also that in 2 CORINTHIANS 13:10, Paul makes it plain that he realised the authority with which he spoke.

The Bible makes no claim that those who wrote Scripture were inspired; however, the Bible does claim that their writings were inspired. This indicates, then, that whether or not Paul was conscious of the Spirit's guidance at the particular moment he was writing, the Spirit of God was superintending what was written to ensure that it was an accurate account of God's will and purpose. Nevertheless, it is obvious to me that Paul was conscious that God was working through him as he wrote; God ensured that Paul (and all who wrote the Scriptures) communicated the mind of God so that we have quite literally the mind of God revealed herein.

The remainder of the Word shows similar evidence that the writers recognised God was at work delivering His word through them as they wrote. These writers did not speak as do modern authors, "I think I am right" or "You probably won't agree with me, but..." Rather, we read in the Word definite affirmations such as, "Thus says the Lord" and "God put His words in my mouth." The writers knew that what was being written was inspired by the Lord God. This continued down to the final pages of Holy Writ, where John warns, "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book" [REVELATION 22:18, 19].<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> R. Laird Harris, *Exploring the Basics of the Bible* (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL 2002) 24

<sup>4</sup> An excellent summation of these truths is provided by John MacArthur, *Unleashing God's Word in Your Life* (Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN 2003) 71-80

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The foregoing considerations bring us to the text. In light of the pleas just made, Paul now admonishes Timothy to remember the pattern of sound words that were witnessed through the Apostle's service before the Lord and to the churches. This admonition applies to the churches of this day, and especially does it apply to those of us who stand in the sacred desk. Join me in exploring the Apostle's command to discover how we should live in this day.

**THE IMPERATIVE** — “*Follow* the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” The man of God is not responsible to break new ground; he is to follow “ancient paths” [see **JEREMIAH 6:16**]. The congregation of the Lord is not to seek new paths; we are to follow the well-beaten paths that saints have trod since the days of the apostles. One grave danger to modern churches is the drive to find the newest idea. Contemporary churchmen often appear to have descended directly from the ancient Athenians. Doctor Luke included a telling description of Athenians when he wrote, “All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new” [**ACTS 17:21**].

An aphorism that has guided my studies and my preaching throughout these years states, “If it's true, it isn't new; if it's new, it isn't true.” The man of God must be cautious about each announcement of that which is new or novel in the world of the Faith. It is the height of presumption to imagine that we will discover some hidden truth lying buried in the Word that brighter minds than ours have failed to see despite the multiplied years of study. Each cult and spiritual aberration that arises claims to have found something new in the ancient Word. Inevitably, the new and the novel turn out to be distortion of truth and exaltation of man.

Writing the Corinthian Christians, Paul issued a simple command that is easily overlooked. It is akin to what is written in our text today. In **1 CORINTHIANS 11:1**, Paul commanded, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” Older translations, and some newer translations, render the Greek, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”<sup>5</sup> Timothy receives essentially the identical command that was issued to the Corinthians. Pattern ministry after a godly individual—one who is pursuing Christ Jesus, and model your own service after that individual. “Follow” does mean following the Word—following Christ; but it also encourages finding a model for ministry. Timothy was to follow Paul's ministry model.

Joe McKeever recently published a blog that addressed this very issue.<sup>6</sup> McKeever described the church service, hesitating to speak of it as a worship service, stating that little thought was given to the hymns, prayers or comments—the service was described as “off the cuff.” After the guest preacher was introduced, he “walked to the pulpit, gave a few opening remarks, then had us turn to his text. Then he stepped out from behind the pulpit and began a full-scale exhortation. He had not even read the Scripture, but he was already into full preaching mode.” McKeever notes that the message was loud and fast, lacking an introduction. The comment was, “This man simply stepped off the high diving board into deep water. Except there was no deep water!”

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<sup>5</sup> E.g. **The Everyday Bible: New Century Version** (Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN 2005); see also, Authorised Version, King James Version, The New English Bible, New International Reader's Version, New International Version (1984), etc.

<sup>6</sup> Joe McKeever, “You May Be Called to Preach, but You Still Need a Role Model,” SermonCentral, [http://www.sermoncentral.com/pastors-preaching-articles/joe-mckeever-you-may-be-called-to-preach-but-you-still-need-a-role-model-2219.asp?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=scnewsletter&utm\\_content=SC+Better+Preaching+Update+20150708+7/7/2015+2:48:45+PM](http://www.sermoncentral.com/pastors-preaching-articles/joe-mckeever-you-may-be-called-to-preach-but-you-still-need-a-role-model-2219.asp?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=scnewsletter&utm_content=SC+Better+Preaching+Update+20150708+7/7/2015+2:48:45+PM), 7/8/2015, accessed 8 July 2015

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The message and its delivery made McKeever think of a shepherd going out to feed the flock and telling the sheep “There’s the food! Get it. It’s yours. Get it.” Then, the man harangued the sheep for not getting into the feed, telling them they were disobedient if they didn’t! McKeever concludes his assessment with this scathing statement, “The essence of his content can be summed up in four words: Fuss at the people.”

We are blessed with good men who pursue God and His Word; there is no excuse for a preacher not to have a godly model for his preaching. I realise that charlatans abound on radio and television and in the pulpit; however, we are blessed today with great men who honour God with sound exposition and with powerful sermons. I grew in the Faith under the preaching and teaching of great preachers, for which I thank God. I was trained under pastors such as Dr. James L. Higgs, Dr. W. A. Criswell and Dr. Paige Patterson. On radio and television, as well as from the pulpit, I grew under men such as Charles Swindoll, John MacArthur, Vance Havner, Adrian Rogers, Charles Stanley, Vernon McGee and numerous other great preachers, many of whom continue offering solid exposition through broadcasts and from their own pulpits. I made it a regular habit to purchase books of sermons to study not only the messages delivered by great preachers, but to discover how they handled the text. If a preacher turned aside from following Christ the Lord—and such did happen occasionally, I ceased following that man. I examined not only the style of ministry preachers employed, but I scrutinised whether the man followed God faithfully or whether he pursued the latest fad in preaching.

Merely repeating the sound words is insufficient; the man of God must “follow” them, “hold” them fast until they become embedded in his character. We have in view wholesome words that will form our character, moulding us into the image of Christ the Lord. When held fast by minister and members, these words will bring good health to the Body of Christ.

This command to follow those who have gone before, faithful to the Word, is repeated throughout the Pastoral Letters. Those who are to be received by the churches as elders must demonstrate this capacity. Recall the qualifications of those who are to be received as elders. “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, *able to teach* [the ability to teach is at least as important as every other qualification listed], not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil” [1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7]. “Able to teach” is more than possessed of good technique—it speaks of fidelity to what has been delivered.

Consider the parallel passage that is found in Paul’s letter to Titus. Even as Paul began the missive, he reminded Titus of the importance of his task. “This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. *He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it*” [TITUS 1:5-9]. Communication skills and fidelity are both sought for those who provide congregation oversight.

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I appeal to but one addition emphasis that Paul provides in this Second Letter to Timothy. “You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and *what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*” [2 TIMOTHY 2:1, 2]. Timothy was not merely to ensure that he held fast to these sound words, but he was responsible to teach them to others so that they, in turn, would be equipped to communicate them to yet others; the Faith would thus be continued indefinitely.

I must address one potential problem. When Paul encourages the Corinthian Christians, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ,”<sup>7</sup> he uses a word that is best translated “imitate,” which is the way it is translated in newer translations of the Bible. The Greek word sounds very much like our English word “mimic.” However, in our text, the Apostle uses another word which means simply “to have,” “to hold” or “to possess.” In simple terms, Paul is commanding Timothy to hold onto the things he was taught. He is to retain the truths he witnessed in the Apostle’s message. While elders, especially, are to model their ministry after that of godly men, the Apostle is now commanding Timothy, and all elders, to ensure that they hold fast to the message. In that original tongue, the word is a present imperative, indicating that this action is to be ongoing. Timothy’s ministry is to be characterised by continuously checking his message against that which he heard from the Apostle and taking immediate action if the message should begin to deviate. The implication is that Paul considered this to be essential if Timothy was to honour the Lord Christ and if he would build the people.

**THE PATTERN** — “Follow *the pattern of the sound words* that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” The Greek word translated “pattern” comes first in the sentence. The location of the word makes it emphatic. “The pattern” is the heart of Paul’s command. This is a rarely used word in the New Testament; in fact, in the New Testament documents, only Paul uses the word, here in our text and in **1 TIMOTHY 1:16**. The word described an outline or sketch such as an artist might draw before beginning the final work of art. In literature, the word pointed to the rough draft drawn up before the final exposition was composed.<sup>8</sup> The idea conveyed by this word speaks of “the outline without the substance.”<sup>9</sup> What is suggested is that all that Timothy had heard from the Apostle was authoritative, but it was not detailed. Paul did not hand off an intricate theology, or a detailed legal code prescribing behaviour for every imaginable situation. Rather, the Apostle’s life and teaching would, if Timothy embraced it, lead into the knowledge of God’s will in every situation encountered.

Paul points to a pattern; and the pattern is the standard by which Timothy is to gauge his service before the Lord and to the people of God. The standard is composed of “sound words.” The word translated “sound” is the root word for our English word “hygiene.” It would mean “healthy.” By implication, there are words that could possibly be used that are unhealthy, they are diseased, they are toxic. However, the standard that is to be embraced by Timothy is that which is healthy, that which builds and strengthens. This is nothing less than a plea for Timothy to model his preaching and teaching on that which he observed in the ministry of the Apostle. Timothy was to ensure that his service before the Lord was apostolic. Likewise, each minister of the Gospel is to endeavour to be apostolic in his service before the Lord.

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<sup>7</sup> **1 CORINTHIANS 11:1** (The Everyday Bible: New Century Version (Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN 2005))

<sup>8</sup> Fritz Rienecker, **A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament**, Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. (tr.), (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1976, 1980) 639

<sup>9</sup> James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, **The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament** (Hodder and Stoughton, 1930) 661

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I must caution all who listen or read that modern thought that discards the Bible as outmoded, as outworn and of nothing more than mere historic value, is the same old unhealthy thoughts that Paul was addressing in this letter to Timothy. That teaching which depends on “human wisdom” [e.g. **1 CORINTHIANS 2:13**] is not new—it is as ancient as the serpent’s hiss in Eden, “Did God really say?” Teaching that jettisons the Word of God in favour of modern science, sociology or philosophy is diseased and contaminated. The casual dismissal of the Word of God as true and authoritative has no place in the healthy teaching of the vibrant congregation of Christ Jesus. And such teaching was threatening the congregation in Ephesus.

Grave error was being perpetuated in Ephesus, just as grave error is found among the churches in this day. Paul specifically mentions some of the serious problems faced in Ephesus. In his earlier letter, Paul indicates that “certain persons” were “swerving from [a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith].” Consequently, they had “wandered away into vain discussion” [see **1 TIMOTHY 1:6, 7**]. He indicates that women were promoting themselves as teachers of the Faith with disastrous consequences for the congregation [see **1 TIMOTHY 2:9-14**]. Others were promoting myths rather than the truths of God [see **1 TIMOTHY 5:6-10**]. Thus, the Faith was threatened by false teachers who casually dismissed the Word.

Some people will always be drawn by the preaching of the Word when it is delivered with verve and authenticity. However, that same passion and probity repulses when people discover that it challenges them at the level of their own life. It is all well-and-good to speak of the failings of others, but when the message begins to expose our own condition, the flesh rebels. Consequently, there will always be a turnover at the fringes of the congregation as some taste the sweet nectar of the Word, only to discover that it leaves a bitter aftertaste to the natural mind. Thus, they decide they want a little bit of religion, but not too much.

It is as though people come to the House of God, saying, “I want three dollars worth of religion. Give me some teaching that is sweet and easy—not too tough, not too bitter, but just right. I need just enough to make me happy, but not so much that I get addicted. I don’t want so much religion that I learn to hate covetousness and lust. I certainly don’t want so much that I start to love my enemies, cherish self-denial and contemplate missionary service in some alien culture. I want ecstasy, not repentance; I want transcendence, not transformation. I would like to be cherished by some nice, forgiving, broad-minded people; but I myself don’t want to love those from different races—especially if they smell. I would like enough gospel to make my family secure and my children well behaved, but not so much that I find my ambitions redirected or my giving too greatly enlarged. I would like about three dollars worth of religion, please.”<sup>10</sup>

So, people float from one church to another, like butterflies sampling the nectar of various flowers, but never settling for long in one place. Should you seek out another place to receive the teaching of the Word, whatever your reason for seeking such change, I am giving some sound advice. Seek out that place where the servants of God are careful to adhere to the pattern of the sound words delivered by the Apostles. They will not deliver the words of the Apostles verbatim, but they will take care to ensure against deviating from the pattern received. If you look only for entertainment, entertainment abounds. If you look for that which tickles the ears, you will not need to look for long, for such ear candy is readily available in far too many churches. If you are seeking personal fulfilment, you can undoubtedly find candy floss that will make you imagine you have found what you are seeking. However, you are given an accurate, trustworthy guide in the Book. Ensure that the minister you choose adheres to this Word.

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<sup>10</sup> Adapted from D. A. Carson, **Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians** (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI 1996) 12-13

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“Healthy words” is a common theme throughout these letters to Timothy and Titus. Here are a few examples of Paul’s use of the phrase. Early in the First Letter to Timothy, Paul emphasised the purpose of the Law. He reminded Timothy, “The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to *sound doctrine*” [1 TIMOTHY 1:10]. Paul does not attempt to name every possible sin that might violate the law of God; rather he named a few specific sins that threatened the faithful in Ephesus. The same sins threaten the faithful in this day late in the Age of Grace. The Apostle then summarises deviation from godliness by warning against, “whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine.” John will warn, “All wrongdoing is sin” [1 JOHN 5:17]. Deviation from God’s will is sinful!

In that same letter, Paul is urging Timothy to adhere to what he had witnessed and been taught. “Teach and urge these things. If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with *the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness*, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain” [1 TIMOTHY 6:2b-5].

In this Second Letter to the Pastor of the Church in Ephesus, Paul spoke prophetically, warning, “The time is coming when people will not endure *sound teaching*, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” [2 TIMOTHY 4:3, 4]. There would come a day when people would not endure healthy teaching. Rather, professed Christians would prefer a diet of spiritual junk food rather than a balanced diet of righteousness and godliness.

Paul would warn Titus that the elder “must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in *sound doctrine* and also to rebuke those who contradict it” [TITUS 1:9]. The elder is responsible to recognise and to understand what healthy teaching is so that he is equipped to provide healthful teaching to those who listen.

Shortly after writing the aforementioned, Paul warns Titus of a great problem in Cretan culture. He wrote, “One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’ This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be *sound in the faith*” [TITUS 1:12, 13]. The Apostle was concerned that the Christians of Crete would be healthy in their practise of the Faith.

I refer to one final statement from the Apostle to the Gentiles. Paul admonishes Titus, “Teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, *sound in faith*, in love, and in steadfastness” [TITUS 2:1, 2]. Older men are to grow in the Faith, exhibiting healthy practise of the Faith.

Obviously, healthy practise of the Faith looms large in apostolic thought. The emphasis given to the pattern Timothy had received and the need for healthy words ensures that we understand that no man has the right to deviate from apostolic teaching. No church should ever turn aside into modernist paths if the apostolic pattern is followed. However, deviation from the Faith has become tragically common in the church world in this day. Many church leaders question the veracity of the Book, imagining that man’s best thoughts will suffice for teaching morality and ethics. Yet, the Apostle warns those who stand to preach, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the Word of Truth” [2 TIMOTHY 2:15].

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Tragically, many churches doubt that Jesus is the One True God, the only means of salvation. To hold such a deviant view they must reject the Apostle's assertion, that Jesus Christ was "declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead" [ROMANS 1:4]. They must refuse to accept Paul's teaching that the Christ is "God over all, blessed forever" [ROMANS 9:5]. To deny that Jesus is very God is to deny the apostolic instruction that teaches, "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works" [TITUS 2:11-14].

Paul was what many Christians today would derisively call a Fundamentalist! He held to certain fundamental truths as necessary for the Faith. He held that Jesus Christ is very God in human flesh, that He was born of a virgin and lived a sinless life and that He presented Himself as a perfect sacrifice because of mankind's sinful condition. Paul believed and taught that Jesus Christ conquered death, rising from the dead, presenting Himself alive to those He chose and that He ascended into Heaven where He is seated at the right hand of the Father. Paul taught that all who have faith in this Risen Lord receive forgiveness of sin and new life. This is the Faith!

**THE REPOSITORY** — "Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, *in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*" The pattern of the sound words will always be found "*in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*" The pattern of the sound words will lead us to seek out and rest in "*the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*" Our purpose in this holy life is not to grasp the message of life so tightly that we fail to allow that message to transform us into the image of God's dear Son. The message of life working in the life of a believer, transforms us, ensuring we reflect the presence of the Living Christ more and more.

A grave danger in preaching the message of Christ that is not often considered is that we will get the message right and fail to communicate the truth. What I mean is that the preacher can tell the congregation all the things that a passage means and fail to show the Saviour to those listening. We who profess to believe the Living Saviour can become like Judas who saw the Master's power, His majesty and His grace and yet failed to embrace Him in His beauty. Something like that can happen to preachers, and it assuredly does happen to far too many who occupy both pulpit and pew in our churches. I sometimes note individuals that know the words, but have somehow never known the melody.

Reading a sermon will not make one a Christian. Listening to a sermon cannot make you a Christian. Studying theology will neither make one a Christian nor make them Christlike. Understand that I encourage reading sermons, just as I encourage listening to great sermons. Studying theology is a beneficial endeavour. However, none of these activities will transform a life. Healthy words do transform lives through "the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." There are many Christians who are as straight as a gun barrel theologically, and just as empty. A saying once heard in the Deep South cautioned, "I'd rather an individual learn his ABCs in heaven than spout Hebrew and Greek in hell." Infidels have occupied the pulpits since the days of the Apostles; and educated unbelievers continue to plague the churches in this day. One noted theologian that helped me greatly during formative years evolved in later years to become a Universalist, believing that everyone would be saved whether they trusted Christ or not. Tragically, he was one of a disappointing number of modern theologians.



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It never ceases to amaze me how some preachers can discuss the most intricate issues of theology, and yet show neither faith nor love that marks the child of God. There are two grave errors evident among the churches of this day which must be avoided. One error teaches that what we feel is primary. Advocates of this system of worship are atheological—that is, they are without significant theological convictions. Such religionists, much as the world about them, believe that it is unloving, antagonistic and even “unchristian” to hold and to teach absolute doctrines. Church services for these individual are graded on how they make the participants feel. The problem with pursuing a feeling is that one never quite arrives at a satisfactory conclusion, the pursuit of the perfect feeling always continues; it is an impossible goal.

Paul described such worshippers when he warned of those who, in the last days “will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” [2 TIMOTHY 4:3, 4]. The grave danger of pursuing one’s feelings to the exclusion of sound words is that these benighted souls “will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power... Among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth” [2 TIMOTHY 3:2-7]. Sound words lead to holy lives; unhealthy words lead to unholy lives.

The other grave error witnessed among the churches of our Lord is revealed in congregations that live by a strict creed that leaves no room for “faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” These saints, for many truly are saved, know all the rules and regulations. If they are lacking a rule to compel uniformity, they are quite prepared to create such a regulation and to impose it on their adherents. However, they leave room neither for faith nor for love. They are able to preach Christ, but revealing the grace and love that marks those who walk with Him seems almost difficult for these dear souls. At times in the past, I’ve referred to such churches as being composed of people with “peg leg” religion. Though their religion does get them around, there is no feeling in it, no life, no vitality. They have to strap it on every day.

There is a balance to be sought and in which the people of God are to grow and rejoice. We do want sound doctrine—healthy teaching that encourages the people of God to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We know that if the Spirit of God is present, we will witness genuine joy, experience true peace and rejoicing in the love of God. We will come together in awe before the goodness and majesty of God who has given such rich gifts to the congregation as represented by those who share our worship. We will truly worship, knowing that we have met with the True and Living God. And we will leave the assembly empowered to serve Him in faith and in love. In short, we will be the church.

There is no need to speak to you of God’s desire for your growth if you have never been born into His family. We do not urge religion on those who hear our message; we present Christ, the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us. This is the message we bring. Jesus, the Son of God, presented His life as a sacrifice because of our sinful condition. He took our punishment on Himself surrendering Himself to death; He was buried and then came to life after three days. He was seen by those to whom He presented Himself. Then, he ascended into Heaven where He is seated at the right hand of the Father. Now, Christ Jesus Himself, the Risen Lord of Glory, invites all who will accept His invitation, to come to life.

**2 TIMOTHY 1:13**  
**THE PATTERN OF SOUND WORDS**

The message of Christ is this, “If you agree with God that Jesus Christ is Master of life, believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with the Father and with the mouth that one agrees with God and is set free.” That promise concludes with an invitation from the Prophet Joel, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved.”<sup>11</sup> Our prayer is your salvation, your freedom from guilt and from sin. Amen.

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<sup>11</sup> Free translation of **ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**