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THE DISCIPLINE OF THE PREACHER'S OWN SOUL

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"Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."—I. Timothy 4:12-16.

Take heed unto thyself!" There we have our key clause. The Greek word translated "heed" is one of intensity. It means to "concentrate, to screw your mind down, fix it, limit it, curb it, confine it, rivet it." The same thought appears in 2 Timothy 2:15, where we read, "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth."

Now surely the sum of all this is not less than the idea of discipline. Interestingly enough, "discipline" and "disciple" are terms that come from the same root; yet we are much more familiar with the latter than the former. The relationship between the two should be appreciated more vividly than it is with most of us. "And whosoever," said the Master, "doth not bear his cross, and come after me cannot be my disciple." That sharp-driving sentence, particularly when read in its context, shows clearly that discipleship involves discipline.

Someone has recently said, "The future of the world is in the hands of disciplined people." Another remarks: "It is a well-established fact that discipline gives strength to men . . . the concept of sacrifice, of its absolute social necessity, must be introduced into the minds of modern men." We do not like Communism, Fascism, or Nazism, but it is wisdom to learn even where we cannot laud. Like it or not, these movements have been "going places." They have become the terror of the world. Why? Because, among other things, they have known what they wanted, they have set themselves a goal and they have been willing to make sacrifices in order to reach it. Added to all this is the quality of dogged perseverance, which again is a proper part of true discipline.

Someone, however, may object to using dictator-controlled parties and peoples for purposes of illustration. The objector need not be alarmed. All that our reference is intended to suggest is that discipline makes for power. Whether that power is for weal or for woe, for good or ill, depends on the ends toward which we discipline ourselves and on how we manage it. Our sympathies are, in principle, with the democracies. France was a democracy.

But France fell because, as we now know, it went on year after year without disciplining itself in respect of private and public morals and united action for the common good. Germany's discipline has been driven through by force—and we don't like that—but it has made for strength nevertheless. Let us agree then that we are at grips with something, in this matter of orderly, sustained and sacrificial procedures, that has importance for all high living, and certainly therefore for our careers who call ourselves the ministers of Christ.

It is a hard saying, but we need to hear it: by and large we Protestant ministers are a pretty undisciplined lot. We are not so much "rugged individualists" as we are "ragged individualists." We are prone to be easy on ourselves and to be singularly lacking in capacity for teamwork with our brother ministers. Ask the bishops, presidents and superintendents of our various communions if you are in doubt about it!

Perhaps, in order to "save face," we are falling back on the argument that after all we are Protestants and not Roman Catholics. Let the question of the disciplines of life be left to them, since they cling to the error of "salvation by works." Unfortunately for that argument, the thing we are really pleading for is not the perpetuation of a Romanist heresy, but the recognition of a popular Protestant fallacy: the fallacy, namely, that because we are saved by faith, and faith alone, we need not bother our heads or our hearts with techniques of holy living, with regimes of efficient service, or with subordinations of personal interest to group welfare. In a word, it is the fallacy of supposing that because we do not work for salvation we need not work from it. We do not hedge a fraction on the Protestant teaching that we are saved by grace alone through faith, but we are insisting that the saved life, in order to be effective, must be disciplined. We are insisting further that here we have an emphasis that needs to be recovered by Protestant believers in general and by their preachers in particular.

Consider, in the light of all this, what Paul wrote to preacher Timothy. In the passage before us he suggests four lines of discipline for Timothy to pursue: exemplification, communication, meditation and continuation.

First, the Discipline of Exemplification. Remember the key clause: "Take heed unto thyself!" In what ways? To begin with, "Be thou an example of the believers." Be scrupulously and unceasingly watchful of the pattern which your life sets before others.

In a social group years ago a man overheard part of an introduction in which another member of the group was being presented to one of America's famous preachers. A few moments later the man stepped up to the distinguished clergyman and, having heard only his title but not his name, said, "Doctor, where do you practice?" "I?" said the quick-witted "Doctor," "I don't practice, I preach!" Alas, it

is not always merely a playful turn of words—it is tragically true.

"Be thou an example!" As usual, Paul is not content to leave us with a platitude, but is at pains to give us particulars. "In speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity, be an example." So Weymouth renders it.

Practice prayerfully the discipline of the tongue. Be ruthless with yourself in your insistence upon a gleaming cleanness and wholesomeness of speech. Avoid the vulgar. Shun the unchaste. Delete the extra adjective. (It wouldn't spell a lie, but it caters to exaggeration). Let modesty prevail in references made to yourself. In any case don't be "wordy." "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin."

But if one is to be exemplary in speech, he must be exemplary in that which lies back of the tongue: the grace of Christian love. Let ministers make sure that "God's love for us floods our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." Let them see to it, moreover, that they do not rest in great "experiences" of the past, but that there is the daily bathing of their whole being in the mind of Christ. Failure here is as fatal in the preacher as it is in the layman—and much more conspicuous. Brothers, if we are ungracious, meddlesome, suspicious, censorious, resentful, short-tempered, can we blame our people if they are slow to take the gospel medicine which obviously we have not taken ourselves?

So we might go on examining the specific phases of character and conduct in connection with which we are to exercise unceasing care and a Christ-enabled self-mastery. The people are watching their spiritual leaders. Some may be demanding a degree of perfection which even the grace of God cannot produce in us while we inhabit these frail tents of flesh. Most of them, however, are looking, not unreasonably, for a consistent manifestation of the simple virtues which truly Christ-controlled men should wear. Many of them are echoing the sentiment of those homely lines:

"I'd rather see a sermon than to hear one any day.

I'd rather one would walk with me than merely tell the way.

The eye is a better pupil and more willing than the ear;

Good counsel is confusing, while example's always clear.

The greatest of all preachers are those who live their creed.

To see good put into action is what every body needs."

Second, the Discipline of Communication.

... "Till I come," says Paul, "give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." Concerning the clause, "give attendance to reading," Oswald Chambers has some comments that strike right at the heart of the matter. "The word 'reading,'" says he, "does not mean what we understand by reading—open-

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