

2 Timothy Lesson 5 Articles

Those who criticize the Church because there are imperfect people in it are criticizing it because it is composed of men and women. It is not given to us to judge; judgment belongs to God.

But it is the duty of a Christian to keep himself free from polluting influences. And if he does, his reward is not special honor and special privilege but special service.

Here is the very essence of the Christian faith. A really good man does not regard his goodness as entitling him to special honor; his one desire will be to have more and more work to do, for his work will be his greatest privilege. If he is good, the last thing he will do will be to seek to stand aloof from his fellow-men. He will rather seek to be among them, at their worst, serving God by serving them. His glory will not be in exemption from service; it will be in still more demanding service. No Christian should ever think of fitting himself for honor but always as fitting himself for service.¹

The Christian teacher and leader is to aim at *righteousness*, which means giving both to men and to God their due; at *faith*, which means loyalty and reliability which both come from trust in God; at *love*, which is the utter determination never to seek anything but the highest good of our fellow-men, no matter what they do to us, and which has for ever put away all bitterness and all desire for vengeance; at *peace*, which is the right relationship of loving fellowship with God and with men. and all these things are to be sought *in the company of those who call upon the Lord*. The Christian must never seek to live detached and aloof from his fellow-men. He must find his strength and his joy in the Christian fellowship. As John Wesley said: “A man must have friends or make friends; for no one ever went to heaven alone.”

The Christian leader must not get involved in senseless controversies which are the curse of the Church. In the modern Church Christian arguments are usually doubly senseless, for they are seldom about great matters of life and doctrine and faith, but almost always about unimportant things like teacups and the like. Once a leader is involved in senseless and unchristian controversy, he has forfeited all right to lead.

The Christian leader must be *kindly* to all; even when he has to criticize and point out a fault, it must be done with the gentleness which never seeks to hurt. He must be *apt to teach*; he must not only know the truth, but also be able to communicate it, and he will do that, not so much by talking about it, as by living in such a way that he shows men Christ. He must be *forbearing*; like his Master, if he is reviled, he must not revile again; he must be able to accept insult and injury, slights and humiliations, as Jesus accepted them. There may be greater sins than touchiness, but there is none which does greater damage in the Christian Church. He must discipline his opponents in *gentleness*; his hand like the hand of a surgeon, unerring to find the diseased spot, yet never for a moment causing unnecessary pain. He must love men, not batter them, into submission to the truth.

The last sentence of this passage is in very involved Greek, but it seems to be a hope that God will awaken repentance and the desire for the truth in the hearts of men, so that those who are caught in the snare of the devil may be rescued while their souls are still alive and brought into obedience to the will of God by the work of his servant. It is God who awakes the repentance; it is the Christian leader who opens the door of the Church to the penitent heart.²

¹ Barclay, W. (Ed.). (1975). *The letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (p. 179). Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press.

² Barclay, W. (Ed.). (1975). *The letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (pp. 180–181). Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press.