A Worthy Example

Introduction

For the second round of TIM talks, we worked through the book of Titus. The previous three talks had been on Titus 1 and I was the first one to give a talk on Titus 2, although I opted to not do the entire chapter.

Again my **target audience** was students, although this time I aimed to prepare a proper gospel talk. The talk was presented on 6 May 2009.

The Talk

> [1]You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. [2]Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. [3] Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. [4]Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, [5]to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. [6] Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. [7]In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness [8]and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us. [9]Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, [10]and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive. – Titus 2:1–10 (NIV)

We all know the figure of Mahatma Gandhi. By human standards, he was a remarkable man. In South Africa he became an advocate for racial equality through passive civil disobedience and non-violent protests. His efforts brought to the world's attention early the injustices Indians suffered in a racially segregated society. In India he supported the cause of Indian independence from Britain and, after independence in 1947, advocated peace between the Hindu and Islamic factions in India. While his beloved India was being torn apart by differences between Hindus and Muslims, Gandhi had read and, to some degree, reconciled for himself the religious text of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Buddhism. He never relented his beliefs and ideals under any hardship or duress and was always prepared to die for the causes he supported. To the world he remains a striking example of pacifism, compassion and tolerance.

Gandhi was raised as a Hindu within the largest empire the world has ever seen. The British Empire was, therefore, very cosmopolitan. It was also, officially, Christian, and during his lifetime Gandhi came into contact with many people from different backgrounds who claimed to be Christian. As I mentioned, he was well read on several religious text. Of these, Jesus's Sermon on the Mount made a big impact on him. While he remained a Hindu, he believed that everyone would do well to keep to what Jesus preached on the mount. However, regarding Christians, he once said:

> "I like your Christ. I do not reject your Christ, I love your Christ. It is just that so many of you Christians are so unlike your Christ."

It is clear that Gandhi had great admiration of Jesus, but when he looked out over the Christian religion, he mostly saw hollow men filled with materialism and greed: people who had heard, but had not listened; people who knew, but did not believe.

Many others beside Gandhi have looked at Christians and not seen anything they liked. The people they looked at could have committed gross atrocities in the name of the church or simply have been unspectacular and not different from anyone else. The examples (or lack thereof) of such people have been the fuel for many critics of the Christian faith. They saw lives they did not desire and teachings taken in without meaning.

Paul recognised the dangers of not leading a life worthy of a follower of Christ. The people to who the passage was directed, lived amongst extreme hedonism. They were surrounded by all the temptations life can throw at a person. It was important for the people of that church to be encouraged by the good examples of their fellow Christians in their day-to-day lives. Are we that different today? Does the world not encourage us to seek the satisfaction of our own desires as quickly as possible? Is it not so that we can all do with a good example of a restrained yet fulfilled life? There is also the matter of the non-believer looking in. It is important to be a good example for them, so that they can see that the Gospel is alive and powerful and not merely a collection of empty words. Those hungry for meaning and fulfilment can then faithfully come and explore the promises of Jesus Christ. And those who scoff and ridicule will be quiet and lacking in arguments against those who profess to follow Christ.

But there is a much more important reason than those I have just mentioned for paying heed to Paul’s instructions. Paul wants the people to be self-controlled, to be kind and loving, to serve others and to teach what is good and right. These are qualities of Jesus. Jesus did not give in to temptations. He taught with patience and kindness. He left His place in Heaven to become a servant on Earth. He loved the people of this world so much that He died for them.

To know and accept Jesus is to become like Him. How can one have a divine revelation and not be changed by it? How can you hear the best news in creation and not share it? How can you be shown mercy and kindness beyond what you deserve, and not show it yourself? Paul gives concrete instructions on how different groups of people should behave. But on closer inspection, we see that all these instructions are strung together by the same themes: those of self-control, those of being an example, those of servitude, and those of love and respect. See, it is not a matter of living according to a concrete set of rules. It is about being wholly and utterly transformed into someone through whom the image of Jesus shines.And this is the image Jesus gave us: He is King, but He came to serve. As God He was all powerful, but He was humble and gentle. We were blind and deaf to the truth, but He came to teach us so that our eyes and ears might finally be open. We hated and killed Him, and He loved us and defeated death so that we can one day enter the presence of God and have ultimate joy and rest.

If you are a Christian, I want to say to you that if you are not known for your deeds, you will be known by the deeds of those around you or those that came before you. Perhaps you have been accused of being someone you are not. If so, stand up, make your deeds, actions, service and self-control known, so that others can see the image of Christ shine though you. If you feel that your life is not a true reflection of Christ, remember that God is not the only one who sees our sins: the people around us also see them. The people to who we should be an example, see how we fail. And we fail them just as much as we fail God, if not more.

If you have not yet come to know Christ, I challenge you to go to the Bible and look at the words and deeds of Jesus Christ. Jesus commands us to be like Him. Is that not something you maybe long for? Is that not a picture of someone you might like to be? If you welcome Jesus into your life, you can start to get to know Him and how He wants you to live your life. I am not promising you a quick fix to anything, nor a short journey. There are going to be many stumbling blocks. But what Jesus promised is real, and alongside Him there is nothing that can keep you from everlasting love and peace.

Critique

The talk was generally well received and the delivery was acceptable.

The main problems lay with my introduction. The Gandhi reference was too long; I gave too much

background information for such a well-known figure. On the other hand, one of the people in the group admitted to not having known who Gandhi was before the talk: he knew the name, but not who he was and what he did. For him, my introduction was too valuable. The Gandhi reference also was inappropriate: despite his claims, he did reject Jesus: he did not accept Jesus as the one and only Saviour and the only path to salvation and righteousness. Him understanding of the Sermon on the Mount was also flawed, or else he would not have been able to so callously reject Jesus as the Messiah.

Finally, it was suggested that the talk might have been better rounded off if I had included the final few verses of Titus 2 in my talk.

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