Preserving Our Spiritual Heritage

Second in the series “Spiritual Heritage”

# Scriptures: 2 Tim. 1:1-14

# Key Thought: We have received a valuable spiritual heritage to preserve.

# Intro:

When you think of the heritage that you will leave to your children or to those that you influence in your life, what do you think of? Some people think solely of monetary and material inheritance -- stocks, properties, businesses, vehicles, land, collections, antiques, etc.

Others think differently. I recall sometime after Keely had grown into young adulthood and was in her college or graduate school years, I said to her. I don't remember the exact conversation context, just my words to her: "You have your inheritance."

She knew that financially, we were barely solvent. What I meant was this, "The way we have raised you -- the values we have passed on to you, the Christian faith we have brought you up in, the educational opportunities we have afforded you - these things are your true inheritance. A great deal of that had to do with her spiritual inheritance, our Christian faith modeled and taught, and affirmed by the churches she grew up attending and the Christian college setting she chose.

Think about our church here. Copper Hill Church is leaving a spiritual heritage in this community, in the lives of individuals and families who come here. It is a heritage of personal faith, an example of prayer, a treasuring of the Gospel message in Scripture, a commitment to helping others, and a bond of fellowship. The spiritual heritage of our church is something valuable to be persevered and passed on to others. It influences everyone who spends time in this discipleship environment.

So how do we preserve spiritual heritage? How do we pass it on to the next generation? How do we prevent essential parts of it from being eroded away by other influences? That was Paul’s concern as well in the passage we read. I believe we can find some answers to our questions in Paul’s letter to Timothy.

# Paul's description of the spiritual heritage

## Timothy’s Spiritual Heritage

In the passage that we read, Paul describes many of the key elements that are included in Timothy’s spiritual heritage. Here are at least seven of them (in the order of the passage).

* A spiritual gift from God V. 6
* Salvation by grace not works through Jesus Christ V. 9
* A call to holy living and divine purpose V. 9
* Life and immortality V. 10
* The gospel V. 11
* The pattern of sound teaching V. 13
* Faith and love V. 13

## Two key objective elements

This list contains some elements that are fairly objective and somewhat theological in nature. Paul desires that Timothy understand clearly the proper truths about God that have been passed down to him and that he needs to hand down to those who follow him in the faith. I would pull out from this list three fundamental objective parts of our spiritual heritage that are as relevant and important to preserve today as they were to Timothy. They are the foundation of the Christian church.

### The gospel

The gospel is the good news of salvation that comes through Jesus Christ. We received this good news through the four Gospels meaning the four accounts of Jesus life that we have at the beginning of the New Testament; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. So preserving our spiritual heritage of the gospel involves passing on the good news of salvation as it is found in the witness from Jesus himself which is recorded in these records. The good news from Jesus is that God loves us and we can receive forgiveness of sins and be raised up to spiritual life and given the prospect of immortality through Jesus.

### The pattern of sound teaching

Paul also mentions the “pattern of sound teaching.” The first referent of the phrase is to the teaching he is passing on to Timothy. Some of this teaching he received directly from divine inspiration. But part of the teaching he also received from his interaction with other leading apostles both in Jerusalem shortly after his conversion and in his interactions with Peter and other apostles in the early days of the church. A key part of this sound teaching which Paul mentions is the firm belief that our salvation is “by grace through faith… not of works (Eph. 2:8, 9).”

## More experiential elements

Some of the elements on the list I made from this passage are more existential, that is they have to do with Timothy’s own experience of the gospel in his personal life. Paul himself often spoke about his own experiences in the faith and frequently related his theology to his experiences. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, valued experience as one of the four pillars of theology. Our personal experience of how God has met with us, how we have sensed God’s presence, felt his encouragement, been wrapped in love by the fellowship of believers, these experiences are essential to our own personal spiritual heritage. We want those who come after us to experience similar things. The danger is that we tend to expect everyone to have the same feelings, which they do not. God deals with us all individually according to our personality.

### Faith and love

In mentioning faith and love, Paul is talking about the attitudes and actions that are an essential part of what it means to be a Christian. Knowing all the right facts, creeds, and theology is not enough to make a person a Christian. One can be extremely knowledgeable about all there is to know about Christian history, Christian theology, and the Bible itself, and not have a spiritual heritage of the kind that Paul is talking about. In order to have the kind of heritage that Paul is talking about one has to be personally involved with the truths that one knows about. One has to be personally receiving love from God and from other Christians. One has to be a believer in God, having faith that God’s presence in your life is transformative.

I think in mentioning faith and love, Paul is also pointing to the fellowship of the family of God where faith and love are practiced. The spiritual heritage that Timothy enjoyed and that we enjoy in faith and love is never intended to be a Lone Ranger experience. Christian faith is intended to be practiced together in the body of Christ, the fellowship of believers. That is where faith is strengthened best. That is where love is put into practice and experienced the most. So the spiritual heritage that we have in the family of God is a heritage of community, a community described by two words, perhaps more than any others, the words faith and love. This Timothy had experienced, and this Paul wants him to preserve. This we have also experienced and this it is up to us to preserve and pass on to those who follow us.

### A call to holy living and divine purpose

Paul also reminded Timothy that he had experienced a call to holy living and divine purpose. In some senses, this call is also objective for it is clearly found in Scripture as a command. But I’ve included it here under the experiential part, because I think it has its power when we feel its authority and application to ourselves, when we find in our own hearts, by the grace of God, a drive to live in ways that please God, and to work for purposes to which God calls us. Paul said,

“Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Cultivating a desire to live rightly is an essential part of the Christian faith. Methodists especially, have sensed and taught a call to holy living as part of the essential core of their spiritual heritage.

Paul is the kind of man who believed that God has “good works prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10). He was driven to accomplish the purposes “for which God has called me heavenward” (Phil. 3:14) as he put it. Timothy had tasted of that fire as well. Paul was urging Timothy to do his best to help others also sense the call to holiness. That is our calling as well.

### A spiritual gift

Timothy had also received a spiritual gift that was a special ability or an enhanced ability by the power of the Holy Spirit in his life. The Bible teaches that every Christian has at least one spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:7). It might be as simple as the gift of being helpful or it might be something like leadership or great faith, or teaching ability or speaking ability, or it might be something totally amazing such as the ability to pray for a miracle like Peter or Paul. Sometimes, also, it is a natural gift that the Holy Spirit has enhanced. That happened to Bezalel in the OT as God gave him extra skills to make the special metal articles and direct the other artisans in making articles for the Temple. Frequently it is something your friends can recognize in you better than you can recognize it in yourself. That is part of your spiritual heritage. You can’t pass that on but you can use it to help others. And we can pass on the concept to help others understand how God works in our lives.

# Two methods of passing on spiritual heritage

Obviously the spiritual heritage of Timothy derived directly from the work of God in his own life. But there were also crucial human influences at work that helped Timothy to receive the spiritual heritage that he had. Paul mentions two different human paths by which Timothy had received his spiritual heritage. These help us to see how we preserve and pass on to others our spiritual heritage.

## Spiritual heritage is passed down in families

First, Paul mentions that Timothy’s spiritual heritage has come down to him through his family. In his case, he had received an example of faith from his grandmother, whose name was Lois, and from his mother whose name was Eunice (v, 5). Likely this example also included some teaching, though that is not specifically mentioned.

I need to say that the passing down of spiritual heritage is not automatic. From time to time it is much in the news today that many younger people who are raised in Christian homes are not continuing in Christian faith. Statistically this is true. But I was reading this week of a counter statistic that explains the situation more completely.

[Researcher Glenn T.]Stanton cites a study that found that among young adults who have left their faith, only 11% had a strong faith in childhood.  Conversely, 89% said that they came from homes with only a very weak faith and practice. (http://www.patheos.com/blogs/geneveith/2018/01/only-moderate-religion-is-on-the-decline/#x9x2lRIkb448zKtK.99)

So what the researcher is saying is that families that practice their Christian faith regularly, seriously and consistently with their children have a much higher chance of passing their spiritual heritage down to their children then do those who practice their faith occasionally, inconsistently, and irregularly.

So example and teaching in our homes is the first and most powerful way to transfer spiritual heritage to the next generation.

## Spiritual heritage is passed down as we mentor those who follow us

The second way that Timothy had received his spiritual heritage was from his mentor, Paul the apostle. Some of us here today did not receive our spiritual heritage from our family at all. JoAnne’s friend Kim is a person like that. All of her spiritual heritage she received from church people who mentored her in her Christian faith. Kims says, “I learned all my Christian faith from Titus 2 women.” She is referring to Paul’s instructions to the people in his protégé Titus’s church. In Titus 2:3 Paul instructs the older women to “be reverent in the way they live” and to “teach what is good.”

Paul had played that mentoring role for Timothy as well.

Our job as a local church here in Copper Hill is to pass down our spiritual heritage to others. We strive to affirm and strengthen the spiritual training being given to the children by their parents. If there are children who are not receiving Christian training at home, by God’s grace, we may be able to be in the role of Paul to them and provide them with the Christian training and heritage that they otherwise might not receive.

In the case of Timothy, he received his Christian heritage both at home and from his mentor, the apostle Paul. That is the strongest way of all. That is the best way to preserve and pass down spiritual heritage – both by parental example and teaching and through mentors in the church.

# Preserving our heritage

## Paul’s warnings

Finally I would like us to note that Paul is specifically encouraging Timothy to guard “the good deposit” that Paul had entrusted to him. Paul notes that it will require the Holy Spirit’s help in order to do this.

This is not the only time that Paul wrote such an instruction. It is also in his first letter.

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith.
1 Tim. 6:20, 21 NIV

What does Paul mean by this instruction?

It is clear in Paul’s instruction to Timothy in his first letter that we can be distracted easily from our spiritual heritage. In Timothy’s day, one way to be distracted was labeled as “godless chatter.” In addition, Paul warned Timothy about people who promoted false ideas, who claimed to know something new, to have a new revelation. Paul warned that those two things must be avoided as threats to Timothy’s spiritual heritage.

## How do we guard the spiritual heritage passed on to us today?

### Be aware or today’s cultural threats

Today’s threats may look different but there are still many threats to our spiritual heritage.

#### False doctrine

As in the days of Paul, some of the dangers to our faith are doctrinal. There are always those who depart from the truth taught in Scripture. They seek a new path, or a new revelation. This is why we need to know what the Scripture says and how the church as a whole has interpreted it so that we are not caught off-guard and so we can recognize when someone is teaching contrary to Scripture. People in the pew need to know Scripture for themselves so they are not completely at the mercy of the pastor. Otherwise how do they know if he or she is leading them astray?

#### Sunday is too busy

Some distractions for our spiritual lives today are simply cultural. This is not the faith-friendly culture of the 1950’s. For one thing, Sunday is becoming more and more just another day for work, commerce, sports, etc. So Christians today have to make a very deliberate and sometimes sacrificial effort to be people who set aside time to be Christ-followers in a regular and devoted way. Culture today also works against our being consistent in our observance of worship time. We travel a lot today both for work and pleasure and for relationships. We attend special events on Sunday. And we don’t value consistency as our parent’s generation did either. So for example, in my parent’s generation, Sunday School teachers would only miss church a couple Sunday’s a year. Nowadays, last I saw the stats, the average Sunday School teacher misses 13 Sundays, if memory serves, which is about one Sunday in four. These are not through neglect, or not getting up in time, but just by scheduled things our culture accepts and in some cases even expects or demands.

#### More direct opposition

Today, unfortunately, we are beginning to face direct cultural opposition as well. For example, we face a cultural pressure to be completely pluralistic with regard to religion. Not even the Ten Commandments are welcomed in the public places lest their placement be interpreted as favoring one faith tradition over another. Peter, when testifying before the Sanhedrin proclaimed:

Jesus is “‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:11-12 NIV

We do not need to be obnoxious about proclaiming such confessions, be we do need to maintain as the Scriptures does that Jesus is the only way. God is not unjust. He will judge people according to the light they have. Scripture affirms that also. But Jesus said, “I am the way.” People need Jesus. That is why God sent him. To affirm that fact is not being intolerant, it is simply being Christian. Christian’s believe Jesus is the way. But as you know, our culture is very intolerant of that stance today.

Paul said to Timothy, “

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.
2 Tim 1:8 NIV

**To preserve our faith and our spiritual heritage, we need to be aware of the challenges we face and ask God for courage and strength to meet the challenges.** Paul said to Timothy,

The Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. 2 Tim 1:7

### One way to be strong is to use the Advantages we have today to strengthen our own faith and practice and to pass our faith on to others. Some of these are very practical.

#### Bible related

Many Bible translations and study Bibles

**Youversion**

**Jesus Video**

**Children’s Bible Stories**

**Study Bibles**

**Recommend You Version of the Bible for phones**

Video dramas of the Gospel story

Jesus Video

Bible reading recorded, or read to you from your phone.

Bible story books and videos for children – simplified language for them, pictures, even cartoon style if you want it.

Study Bibles

#### Other resources

**Pastors sermon on online during the week, sermon tab on pastor’s blog at learntobewise.com**

**Sunday school classes for children at Copper Hill. Materials that are available today are better than ever.**

Small groups such as Bible studies are popular and available

**Networking ease – use social media to support one another in prayer and with encouraging verses.** Don’t put likes on unwholesome things, even if they are put on by close friends and are funny.

Sunday School for children

Small Group Bible studies

Help others through our church

Resources of the wider church

**Take advantage of the special events at large churches.**

#### Ease of access

**For better or worse – all kinds of Bible info and devotional material at our fingertips-I say for better or worse because it is of widely varying quality. Ask for recommendations.**

Learntobewise.com

Use social media to encourage and support others

Free online study and devotional material