

2. Jesus Showed How to Develop Godly Character

In our last topic, we talked about the fact that Jesus knew His followers would become like Himself. One of the things Christ both taught and demonstrated in His life was godly character. He demonstrated that character and spent much of His ministry showing the disciples how to develop that character. Paul later taught Timothy the importance of teaching godly character by example. In 1 Timothy 4:11-12, we read, “These things command and teach. Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” In our study today, we will see how Christ developed these things in the lives of the apostles.

First, we see that Timothy was to be an example to the believers by the words he spoke. In Matthew 12, a large multitude followed Christ and His disciples. As a result, Christ began to teach the multitude. In Matthew 12:34-35, Christ made a very important statement to the Pharisees. “Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.” In this passage, we see that Christ made it very clear that the thing that controls the words people speak is the heart or the inner man.

Christ provided an example for His disciples in Luke 9:54-56, where we read: “And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, ‘Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?’ But He turned and rebuked them, and said, ‘You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.’ And they went to another village.” Christ taught the disciples that their words came from what was in their hearts. Then, Christ modeled, by both His words and His actions, that they were to be an example in word. Christ explained that His purpose was not to destroy the lives of men, but to save them. Then, Christ modeled this godly character by backing His words with actions. He did this by taking the disciples to another village, rather than giving them the opportunity to do what they had suggested by their words.

Second, we see that Timothy was to be an example to the believers by his conduct. Christ also taught the disciples to be an example by their conduct. In John 13:16-17, we read, “Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” Christ had just served the disciples by washing their feet. Now, He was encouraging them to follow His example and serve others. Peter, and the other apostles, demonstrated the attitude of a servant many times in Acts. In Acts 10:29, Peter asked Cornelius, “Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?” He showed a servant’s attitude by asking how he could help them. His comment, in Acts 15:10-11, shows again his desire to serve the Gentiles. “Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.”

Third, we see that Timothy was to be an example to the believers by his love. Christ also taught

the disciples to love by His love for them. In fact, the new commandment speaks of the love Christ had for His disciples. John 13:34-35 says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Christ asked them to love one another in the same way He loved them. He had modeled love for them, and they were to show others how to love by their example.

Peter passed on that same commandment. 1 Peter 1:22 says, “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart.” John also passed on this commandment. 1 John 4:7, 11 say, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” Peter, John, and the other apostles also provided an example of love for new Christians. Acts 2:46 says, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.” The early church was being shown how to show love by example.

Fourth, we see that Timothy was to be an example to the believers in spirit. Christ also showed the disciples how to be an example in spirit. We see that the disciples had much to learn in order to be an example in spirit. Luke 9:54-56 says, “And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, ‘Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?’ But He turned and rebuked them, and said, ‘You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.’ And they went to another village.”

In these verses, we see that Christ rebuked the disciples for their spirit of retaliation. In contrast, Christ provided an example of a spirit of love and concern for the salvation of the Samaritans. Acts 8:25 shows us that Peter and John developed this same spirit of love for the Samaritans. That verse says, “So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.” Instead of continuing to have a spirit of retaliation, and a desire to get even with the Samaritans, John had developed the same spirit of love that Christ had shown toward the Samaritans. He wanted to share the message of salvation and forgiveness of sin with them, because he learned from the example of Christ.

Fifth, we see that Timothy was to be an example of faith. Christ provided an example of faith for the disciples. In Luke 17:3-5, we read, “‘Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.’ And the apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith.’” Christ was teaching the disciples how to forgive. However, they also realized another very important lesson. They had to have Christ increase their faith in order to forgive as Christ forgave.

Christ responded, in Luke 17:6, “So the Lord said, ‘If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey

you.” Christ helped the disciples to realize that it was not the size of their faith. The key was that their faith was in Him. If they would yield their lives to Him, He would give them the faith to do whatever needed to be done. We see that the disciples learned from the example of Christ. In Acts 3:6-7, we read, “Then Peter said, ‘Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’ And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.” The disciples had learned that their faith must be in Christ, not the size of their faith.

The word that is translated “faith” also speaks of faithfulness. Peter, and the other apostles, had also learned that Christ was faithful. In fact, in 1 Peter 4:19, Peter wrote, “Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.” Peter knew that Christ was a faithful Creator.

Sixth, we see that Timothy was to be an example in purity. Christ provided an example of purity in all areas of His life. We see that the disciples learned the importance of purity from the example of Christ. 1 Peter 2:11-12 says, “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.” Peter realized that the godly example of the purity of Christians was one of the most powerful ways to reach the Gentiles for Christ.

There were also many other areas where Christ helped the disciples develop godly character by His example. The key is that Christ chose to teach godly character both by His teaching and His example. As leaders, we want to help developing leaders learn both from our teaching and our example. We want to help developing leaders learn to teach Biblical principles that help others to develop godly character. At the same time, we also want to help developing leaders learn to illustrate those Biblical principles in their own lives. That will only happen as we provide an example of godly character for leaders to follow. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders learn to teach Biblical principles for godly character, both as they teach the Word of God and also as they demonstrate godly character by their lives.