

Some Qualifications Basic to Service

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes that true qualifications for service to God are spiritual rather than natural, as exemplified by Timothy's character and dedication.

Scripture: Philippians 2:19, 1 Timothy 5:23

Topics: "Devotion to God", "Spiritual Qualifications"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the qualifications for service in God's kingdom are not based on natural abilities but on spiritual devotion, energy, and unselfishness, as exemplified by Timothy. Despite his youth, timidity, and physical weaknesses, Timothy was chosen by Paul for significant responsibilities because of his genuine commitment to the Lord. Sparks highlights that true greatness in service comes from the heart and that spiritual value can compensate for natural limitations. He encourages believers to recognize that God looks beyond outward appearances and sees the potential in those who are devoted and energetic in their faith. Ultimately, the message is that spiritual qualities are what truly matter in God's work.

Transcript

Qualifications Not Natural but Spiritual

Timothy was a young man - it would seem that he was little more than a boy - when Paul first found him. In addition, he was of a very timid and shrinking disposition and temperament - anything but self-assertive and self-sufficient; he was one who could easily be put down by anyone who was assertive. Because of his youth and of his timid disposition he could easily be despised; and perhaps also because evidently he was not physically robust. "Use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" Paul later wrote to him (1 Tim. 5:23). Young, shrinking, timid, physically weak; yet the Apostle looked at him - and Paul was not one to act impulsively, without thought and care and discernment - and said, 'I want that lad with me.' Then we find that young man's name joined with the name of the great Apostle - may we not say, with the name of the greatest of the Apostles? Their names are joined in association in the superscription of both the letters to the Thessalonians, of the second letter to the Corinthians, of the letter to the Philippians, of the letter of the Colossians, and then there are two whole letters written by the Apostle to Timothy himself; so that Timothy was connected with each of the four groups of Paul's letters. Then, after Paul's release from the first imprisonment, Timothy is found with him going on a journey, and Paul leaves him at Ephesus in charge of the church there.

If you were seeking a 'call' - as it is termed today - to a church, for various reasons you would not have chosen Ephesus, especially if you knew your own weaknesses as Timothy knew his. But Paul put him there in charge of the church because there was very serious need; some very difficult situations needed dealing with. That is the church where Timothy had to set things in order, in accordance with all that the Apostle gave him in those two letters which he addressed to him there.

Why? If we look to see why Paul did it, we see no natural grounds at all to justify either the choosing of him in the first place or the appointing of him to that great responsibility. Paul must have seen something, however; and I think we are able to discern some of the things that accounted for it.

Devotion to the Lord

There is no doubt that one thing characterised Timothy, and that was genuine devotion to the Lord. That is the first thing - real devotion to the Lord. You see, there are tremendous possibilities where there is that foundation. There may be many deficiencies and weaknesses, but real devotion to the Lord is a ground upon which the Lord can build big things and do a great deal.

Energy in the Things of the Lord

Another thing about Timothy clearly was his energy; out of his devotion sprang his energy in the things of the Lord. I leave you to trace the life of Timothy from the day Paul took him away. See what Paul says about him, and see where he is and what he is doing and everything else that you can trace, and you will find that what I am saying has plenty of support. He was not in any way slothful. Paul was at one time far away from him and in need, and he sent for him to come, and to bring with him the cloak and the parchments that Paul had left at Troas (2 Tim. 4:9-13): We can have no doubt that Timothy hastened to reach the Apostle as quickly as he could. There is this mark of the businesslike about Timothy, of real energy.

Unselfishness

I think another thing is perfectly clear - his absolute unselfishness (c.f. Phil. 2:19-22).

These three things amount to this - that Timothy, with all his natural handicaps and disadvantages, was a young man who meant to be no second-rate servant of the Lord. He was on stretch to be the fullest that it was possible for a man to be for God, and you know that it is remarkable and very true that the spiritual value of a man or a woman can more than make up for a great deal of natural lack. How often we have to say of someone, 'Well, there is this and there is that about them, they are not this and they are not that, and those features would really rule them out; but their spiritual value more than makes up for all that.' I am sure that is how it was with Timothy, and that is what Paul saw - that here was one who, from his conversion in early life, was utterly for God, who really meant business. There is no 'survival of the fittest' here. A young man like this - no natural leader: with these men at Ephesus trying to ride over his head (Paul said, "Let no man despise thy youth"): with all that weakness and handicap - he is the man for the task, he is the man who is drawing out from the Apostle all that is in the two epistles written to him. How greatly a man with many limitations can count for the Church's good for many centuries to come because there are some things about him which entirely supersede all his natural limitations! I think that is the message here.

Greatness is a Matter of the Heart

If you look at it the other way round, there are plenty of people full of assumption and presumption who are always pushing themselves forward - always ready to be in the limelight, to do the talking, and so on - who are fairly sure of themselves and have no hesitation and certainly no shrinking, but you do not always find the real spiritual values there. Such people are self-sufficient. But, on the other hand, what we have been saying is a tremendously encouraging thing, because I suppose most of us feel that if the Lord were looking for a good and capable servant we should not expect Him to look in our direction; and yet, you see, "The Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7), and if He really sees that we mean business, that there is a selfless devotion to Himself, and real energy, these things will count with Him; they give Him ground upon which He can build, and He will act accordingly.

If all that we have said of Timothy as to his natural disqualifications were true, and if Paul had been looking for the naturally robust type, he would not have looked a second time in Timothy's direction; he would have said, 'That will let me down.' But no; it comes about that this young man of whom these things are evidently true, who does need a good deal of encouragement, support, reassuring, nevertheless for some reasons - there are reasons for it - becomes in this way, for all time, linked with the great Apostle Paul. Do you not think that it is remarkable that Paul should link Timothy's name with his like that? "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus..." It says something very encouraging - that there are certain things which make a tremendous amount possible with the Lord, but when you look to see what those things are, there is not necessarily anything natural at all. It is purely spiritual value. Anything is possible when the Lord has in us spiritual measure. It outweighs everything else.

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