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**On the
Outside,
Lookin' In...**

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Series: I Timothy

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On the Outside, Lookin' In...

The missionary was stunned. He had been teaching the natives a series of lessons on the character of God. He had carefully taken a theological treatise on God's nature and tried to translate it into language they could understand. It wasn't easy. So many words were different in their vocabulary. So many concepts didn't carry over into their understanding.

He had just completed a look at the patience of God, when a dear old man who had been sitting through all the classes came to him with big tears in his eyes. "I do not understand", the man uttered in his native tongue. "I do not understand. You speak of a God who *is slow to anger*, but when your wife says something you do not like, you *get angry fast*. Is He different in heaven than He is in you?"

The man had no answer. He had been struggling for days to come up with the right words so he could express who God is, and what God is like; but it never dawned on him that they *were not hearing what he said, they were seeing how he lived*. That, they surmised, must be what God is *really like*. Many an unbeliever has had a difficult time accepting the love of God and the holiness of God and the peace of God, because the only framework they had to measure by was that of their parents, *who claimed to have God resident within them*, and they didn't measure up to the quality of the lessons they claim to possess.

This, of course, is a hard subject; but then we have been plagued with hard subjects these past few lessons. We have been sitting across the desk from the Apostle Paul, applying for positions of leadership in the Christian church. He has developed an application blank with a series of questions for us to answer; and it seems as though the intensity of what he is asking never lets up. He has talked to us about character

(who we are) and about self-control (how we behave). Now he is zeroing in on how we stand the test of time, how kind the years are to our witness and how consistent the transformation is in our lives. If we thought the tough questions were behind us, we must think again.

The remainder of our look at Paul's application for greatness will take the form of three questions:

"How does the world see you?"

"How does your family see you?"

"How does the church see you?"

The family issue will center around two phrases: "hospitality" and "one who rules his own family well". The church issue will focus on two phrases as well, "not a novice" and "apt to teach". In this study, however, we will look solely at one statement Paul makes about the godly man. It reads like this:

Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.
(I Timothy 3:7)

This is one of the few phrases in this passage that carries with it a specific distinct warning. It doesn't just say, "God's man ought to be *like this*". It says, "If he isn't, *there are grave consequences*." The demand is for a "good report". The audience is "those who are without" (those outside the church). The potential consequences involve "falling into the condemnation of the devil or giving Satan a club with which to destroy you". Even on the surface that phrase alone would communicate to us that this is a word that we must not take lightly.

In today's study, we are going to look at what that phrase "good report of them without" really means, and we are going to attempt to see some specific examples from Scripture that we can use to measure our lives by.

Our title is: On the Outside, Lookin' In. Our outline takes this form:

On the Outside, Lookin' In...

I- On the Outside, Lookin' In

II- The Character of God and the Christian

A- The Patience of God and Anger

B- The Holiness of God and Habits

C- The Righteousness of God and Ethics

D- The Word of God and the Tongue

E- The Sovereignty of God and Submission

F- The Love of God and the Deeds of Man

ON THE OUTSIDE, LOOKIN' IN

The passage we are looking at teaches one of the most basic truths about our Christian witness mentioned in Scripture, but it is one of the most overlooked. The word “moreover” indicates that this is a statement that is primary in the context of the passage and must not be overlooked.

The phrase “have a good report” is the key. The word “report” is the Greek word (*marturian*) meaning the testimony of one’s reputation. The word “good” is a word meaning that which is excellent or worthy of respect, because it is a reflection of the character of God. The phrase “them which are without” means those outside the Body of Christ; unbelievers; those who are “on the outside, lookin’ in”, so to speak.

That’s where this lesson gets its name. It is a study of how the world, skeptical though it is, yet searching as it is for real truth, views the life of the man of God from *its perspective*. There is a great misunderstanding of the Christian’s responsibility in the marketplace. There are those who believe that when Jesus said, “they hated Me, they will hate you; the servant is not above his master”, Jesus was implying that we, as believers, have a responsibility to be rejected. We have missed the point. Our lives are to be “blameless”: “above reproach”. There is to be nothing in how we behave that would cause someone to stumble who is coming to know Christ. It is the Gospel that offends, not the life of the believer. Your holiness may convict someone and thus appear to be an offense. I Peter chapter four indicates that’s *his problem*. But *never is the way we conduct ourselves to be the offense*.

The other extreme is one that says you never proclaim the

Gospel to those around you, lest you create an offense. That would make Jesus' life of no effect. That's all He did. No, the balance is that we live before the world *blamelessly*, so that when we share the reason for the difference in our lives, they will be clearly deciding on the life of Christ, not stumbling over ours.

The literal meaning of this admonition by Paul is "God's man needs to have a blameless testimony with those outside the church". When his name comes up, there should be a sense of awareness that *this man is different*. And I believe the inference is that men who strut around the marketplace wearing their Christianity on their sleeve or on bumper stickers or with tracts, but *who do not typify the nature of God by how they live*, are doubly accountable. They are advertising themselves to be representatives of the King, while reflecting attitudes the King does not have. So the key to this passage is: "*How does your life look to those who are 'on the outside, lookin' in'.*"

THE CHARACTER OF GOD AND THE CHRISTIAN

Perhaps each of us needs to reread Colossians, chapter three, every week. It reminds us of some very crucial facts that ought to affect our Christian walk. Let me share a portion of it with you:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.

Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,

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and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,

where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;

bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:1-17 NKJV)

Here you have a vision of the Christian life. It is a series of choices, by which the old man (the flesh) is replaced by the new man (the Spirit's control), which results in behavior that is radically (not marginally, but radically) different.

Now look at it for yourself. I think we all like to look at the before and after ads in the newspaper. We don't really believe them, do we? Most of them are for some kind of diet program. We really don't believe them but we want to. There is a picture of a person from before and after the diet. Well, Paul has given us a before and after picture and it's impossible to believe it apart from the miracle of the Spirit of God.

Now think about it. Paul said here you were before you became a Christian. A life characterized by immorality, idolatry, anger, blasphemy, filthy conversation, and a lying tongue becomes a life noted for mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, love, and peace. These are not subtle changes in personality. These are *radical changes of character*. And these character changes are not due to some kind of special education or training. They are the result of

an inner transformation that occurs because God indwells you and changes you from the inside out. And those on the outside lookin' in cannot help but see the change.

Total change. How? Because you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. The “you” the world used to see is dead. And dead men can't do the things they used to do. Now Christ is alive in you, and when He lives through you, *nothing is the same*. And I believe, we in the church today, have so compromised our convictions of what we think God expects of us because we have forgotten that Christ in us is radically different. We are becoming a totally, completely new person in Christ.

Your new behavior, then, is nothing more than the character of God, who now lives in you, radiating through you. And those on the outside lookin' in, who are looking for God, can see how God behaves by watching Him behave in you.

Therefore, every difference in how you live reflects a part of God's nature. It is His nature in you changing you. And the world cannot help but notice the change.

The Patience of God and Anger

That means that a world that has heard of the longsuffering of God, but has never seen it, is looking at your life to see how patient God is. That is why you are to “put away wrath, anger, and all malice” according to Paul. You must do that to put on the “longsuffering” of God.

When you lose your temper on the job, you are saying to your fellow employees, “look at the patience of God. This is how it looks.” They see you lose your composure, scream, yell, react with hostility and vengeance; and they say, “this isn't the God he's been telling me about.” They don't know *which to believe*...what you say, or what you do. Chances are, they'll believe what you do. And you will have become a huge stumblingblock to the very people you desired to win to Christ. That is why Paul has been so intent on saying that the Christian man who is either aggressively hostile or who is retaliatory when confronted is not fit to lead the church. The

world is on the outside lookin' in, and *they measure God's patience by ours.*

The Holiness of God and Habits

Men who are piously spiritual at church, but who enjoy the dirty jokes and the suggestive remarks at the office have no testimony with the world. You may convince yourself that you don't want to be "holier than thou", but that won't fly. Either you are the temple of the Holy Spirit or you're not. If you are, the things that defile that temple have no place in your life. The other guys can talk that way or go to those places or do those things, and *they may even make fun of you for not doing so.* But no matter what they say, they *expect you to be different.* Not condescending, different. Humbly different. Because if you're not different, then their inner longing that there is more to life than they have experienced doesn't hold up.

Have you ever read Ephesians 5:4 as it is paraphrased in the Living Bible? It says this:

Dirty stories, foul talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, remind each other of God's goodness, and be thankful.

The language and behavior of God's man cannot compromise. Not at all. Cursing from the lips of a believer is an affront to the nature of God. He is holy. And Peter adds in I Peter 1,

But as He who has called you is holy, you also so be holy in all your conduct [behavior],

because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

(I Peter 1:15,16 NKJV)

The Holiness of God. It is best demonstrated as the man of God makes choices to be holy as He is holy. And the more compromises we make, men, either in front of our families or our friends or our fellow-workers, the less likely we are to lead them to Christ. The world is on the outside, lookin' in. And what they are looking for is a kind of moral purity that doesn't even exist except in Christ. Either they see it in you, or they won't see it. That is why Paul says your reputation

with those who are “outside” must be beyond question. The character of God needs to reflect through you. To say, “I’m a Christian,” but fail to reflect His holiness is to give the world that is on the outside, lookin’ in mixed signals. They will reject what you say, because you are not showing them what you are telling them.

The Righteousness of God and Ethics

Perhaps the greatest single abuse of all is the matter of Christian ethics and the workaday world. Here is where life gets real and life gets tough. Here is where the world is looking to see if you are willing to compromise in the little things of life rather than stand alone. Here is where the world is lookin’ in and waiting and watching to see if you’ll fudge just a little on that business deal, because “everybody else is doing it”. Will you lie “just a little” to make a sale? Will you turn your back while others do it? Will you tell people what they want to hear, even if it’s not what they ought to hear? Will you fudge on your expense account because everyone else does? Will you “pad” your daily report sheets so the boss will think you’re making more calls than you are? I know, everybody does it. Paul is saying here that the man of God doesn’t. He must be “blameless” before the world. The nature of God is perfect righteousness. And if you tell others about the righteousness of God and then willfully compromise, they will assume that Christ in you is only as righteous as you are. And they will assume, then, that Christians are not any different from anyone else. They are just more hypocritical. They’re on “the outside, lookin’ in”, and they don’t understand how God in you could be so different than you represent Him to be. Do our ethics show and tell the righteousness of God?

The Word of God and the Tongue

Perhaps the next great compromise in our testimony comes from the misuse of what the book of James calls “that flame of fire called the tongue”. It says this:

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.

But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil,

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full of deadly poison.

With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.

Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?

Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh. (James 3:7-12 NKJV)

That, Beloved, is how the people where you work see you if your “Praise the Lord” is followed by gossip, or judgmental comments, or sarcasm, or lying, or words that are off-color or rude. They don’t understand. How can bitter water and sweet water come from the same spring? How can you talk of God’s holiness and then use bad language? How can you talk of God’s love and then cut someone to pieces with the same tongue? How can you talk of God’s righteousness and then lie or “bend the truth”: to fit your needs? They don’t understand. They’ll never understand. The truth is that God’s Word, that which has come from His lips, is constant. The grass withers, the flower fades, but not God’s Word. It will ever be the same. And when we who claim to have His Word laid up in our hearts spew filth or hurt or lies from the same lips that proclaim that infallible Word, the world wants no part of our testimony. We must be blameless before the world, constant before the world, consistent before the world, or else we have nothing to say to the world. Nothing at all. James adds in chapter one,

If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless. (James 1:26 NKJV)

The Sovereignty of God and Submission

Likewise, those we work for and those we work with simply cannot grasp our message when we are less than submissive to authority. We talk about a sovereign God. We piously add “God will meet my needs.” Then when things

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don't go our way, instead of trusting the God we boast of, we resist the very authority that is ordained by God, and take matters into our own hands. Thus, the difference between what we say we believe, and what we demonstrate when the chips are down, is simply too much. Perhaps the best single measuring stick of your spirituality is not how those in your church or your Bible study view your life. The best measuring stick will probably come from your unbelieving boss, or those unbelievers who work alongside you. And their single most important consideration will probably be how you view the sovereignty of God when the shoe falls, and it's your shoe. They won't be impressed by your sermonettes when their world is falling apart. They will be impressed by your quiet response to life's authorities when you are wrongly accused and you take it patiently. They will be impressed when your world falls apart, and you patiently trust God in the shadows of life. Then your testimony will have power. You will have a "good report" among those who are on "the outside lookin' in".

The Love of God and the deeds of men.

And finally, the bottom line is how we give ourselves away to those who need us where we work, where we live, wherever we are placed in the marketplace of life. Are we willing to "get involved" with the real problems of the kids in the school where we teach? Are we willing to become vulnerable by making ourselves available to hurting people at the office? Are we willing to involve ourselves in feeding and clothing and literally waiting on those even in our neighborhood who are in the midst of life's storms, and have no one to turn to? Paul's final reminder in that Colossians three passage was this:

But above all these things put on love, which is the
bond of perfection. (Colossians 3:14 NKJV)

When all else is said and done, the measuring stick of who God is comes when we, like Jesus, are asked to lay aside our "robes of righteousness" and take on the form of a servant, and make ourselves of "no reputation", willing, if need be, to die that others might find life.

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Men, if your life is characterized by that level of unselfishness and humility, then those around you can understand the love of God. They can see it in you. James added,

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (James 1:27 NKJV)

John adds,

But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. (I John 3:17,18 NKJV)

That's how those on the outside lookin' in are measuring who God is. Not by how many verses you quote. Not by the way you carry your Bible to work so everyone can see it. Not by how you pretentiously pray in the cafeteria. But by how you respond to hurting people. That they can relate to. And that they can relate to the incredible love of God you testify to, as well.

Paul is saying to us, "Men, how would you like to be a Christian leader? Then go ask your boss, or your coworker, or the guy in the store where you shop, or the people in the school where you teach, what they think God is like, based on how you behave. Go ahead and ask them. And based on how they see the character of God through the lens of your life, you can determine how "your light so shines before men that they might see your good works and glorify your Father who is in Heaven". You are supposed to have a "good report of them without". That means you are to be well thought of by those who are not believers who have occasion to see you.

It isn't just how many tracts you pass out. If the nature of God defined in those tracts: His love, His righteousness, His Holiness, are not at all consistent with the love and the righteousness and the holiness they see in you, then you are asking them to believe what you say in spite of what you do. Some may. But it isn't likely. And even if they do, you will

have missed the blessing of having them not only hear the Gospel, but see it alive in you.

The issue, Beloved, goes back to Colossians, chapter three again. It is an issue of putting off and putting on. We are to “put off” “immorality, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, covetousness, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language, and lying”. We are to replace those things by “putting on “tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering, love and peace.”

Paul almost makes it sound easy. “Put off”, he says. “Put on”, he says, as though character transformation were as simple as changing clothes. We all know it’s not, so that can’t be what he meant. What did he mean? Perhaps we need to go back to chapter two of Colossians,

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord,
so walk in Him,

rooted and built up in Him and established in the
faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with
thanksgiving. (Colossians 2:6 NKJV)

How did you receive Him? By faith. You couldn’t do it. God had already done it. His desire was to save you. All you had to do was let Him. Could it be that living the Christian life is as simple as receiving the Christian life? Not as *easy*—but as *simple*. Could it be that God wants us to go back to that simple, childlike faith that saved us for the power to live the life we now possess? Could it be that Jesus in us wants to impart His character to us just as much as He wanted to give His life to us? And could it be that, if we will but let Him, He will manifest Himself to those in the outside world with such power, and with such a distinct difference, that they will want what we have, His very life? It could be.

Yes, it could be that living the Christian life in the everyday-world boils down simply to letting Christ live His life through you. No, it isn’t that it *could* be, but it *is*. You “put off” immorality by choosing to let Christ in you control you when the temptation comes. You “put on” tender mercies by letting the mercy of God who is resident within you express Himself when someone is hurting. You “put off” covetousness

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by choosing to let the unselfishness of Christ be free to express itself when you are tempted to want what you do not need. You “put on” the humility of Christ when you choose to let His mind be in you, when the world is clamoring to give you acclaim. He made Himself nothing. You can choose to do the same. You do not have the power to be humble, apart from Christ. But you have Christ. He lives in you. And He is never anything but humble and meek and pure and patient.

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

(Colossians 3:2,3 NKJV)

That means that tomorrow morning, when you get to the office or the classroom or the store, and the bullets begin to fly, you have two choices: you can start to react as you always have; or the instant the choice is to be made, you can say to yourself, “Wait a minute; I’m dead. Dead men get angry. Dead men can’t lie. Dead men can’t do anything. Lord, You respond instead.” And believe that He will. The next onslaught may come seconds later. Don’t wait. Don’t try to handle it on your own. Quietly respond, “Lord, here we go again, I’m dead, you’re alive, live through me.” Then consciously relax, and let God be Himself. You will be patient, because He in you is perfect patience. You will be holy because He in you is perfect holiness. Your tongue will be consistently pure and sensitive and kind. Why? Because His Word is. And that Word abides in you.

His love will overflow through you into those around you. His peace will settle upon you and pour through you. That, Beloved, is the Christian life. “You have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless, you live, yet not you, Christ lives in you, and the life you live, you live by faith.” You choose to believe that He will reveal His very nature through you if you will but let Him. Can we dare do otherwise? NO! Why not? Because there is a whole world on the “outside lookin’ in”. They’re not lookin’ for dead men. They are lookin’ for the Living God. May they find Him in us.

Let us pray,

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Our Father and our God,

We thank You that we can't live the Christian life. But, oh, Father, we thank You even more that we don't have to, that You live and breathe in us, and desire through us to let all of the very aspects of Your character flow through us to a world that desperately wants to know who God is.

We pray, Father, particularly for the men in the church, for ourselves, as we examine this passage Paul has written specifically to us, that we would begin to weigh the reality of our Christian life not by how our Christian friends think we are, but by how the world outside sees that we really are.

Somehow, Father, in spite of ourselves, may we this hour, afresh and anew, surrender and quit trying to do what only You can do, and just get out of Your way and enjoy the sheer ecstasy of living the Christian life when You live it. Send us back to the marketplace, Father, with a renewed consciousness that Christ in us is the hope of glory. And may others see a demonstrable difference, and radical difference because everything we were is dead, and everything You are is alive.

To Jesus alone be praise and honor,

Amen.

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