

## SERMON

**Lois and Eunice** (2 Timothy 1:1-5; Acts 16:1-3)

What do Samuel Boutwell, Terry Durham and Ana Carolina Dias have in common? Here are some pictures of them.

Samuel Boutwell is a seven-year-old evangelist who began preaching when he was just a toddler. He has to convert sinners and the sandwich board his father carries when Samuel is preaching on the streets says, it include drunkards, liars, fornicators, adulterers, thieves, homosexuals, blasphemers, hypocrites and money-lovers. Samuel takes his vocation to save sinners from rotting in eternal hell extremely seriously. Most Saturdays he stands in front of his local abortion clinic in Jackson, Mississippi and, Bible in hand, bellows:

**'Don't kill your child! Repent! God loves the little children!'**

Nine-year-old evangelist Terry Durham was ordained as the world's youngest minister when he was just six. Terry Durham is a Florida firebrand, who likes nothing more than to put on his oversize blue suit and alligator shoes, and whip the crowd into a frenzy. Terry holds the honour of having been the world's youngest ordained minister.

And finally this is Ana Carolina Dias who regularly addresses crowds of thousands in her native Brazil. Her followers believe her prayers can cure illness and even stop prison sentences. Ana and her father often preach in the shanty towns and prisons of Rio. She began preaching at just three years of age and regularly commands TV audiences of millions. Her mission: to save the hardened gang members and drug dealers of Rio's shantytowns.

The connection? They all appeared on Thursday evening on the Channel 4 programme Cutting Edge which was looking into what they titled it as *Baby Bible Bashers*. All three it seemed had Christian parents, all three held deeply seated convictions and were preaching the word of God with their parents' consent and backing.

You may or may not agree with what the children were doing, or perhaps more importantly what the parents were doing to their children and the implication was made on the Channel 4 programme about the motive of the parents – was it altruistic, was it for God, or was it for money to life a good lifestyle on the backs of the their children?

However I feel sure that this did not happen to Timothy, the protégé of Paul, the one about whom so often he describes him as my son. When he writes to the church of God at Corinth he writes

**“For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.” (1 Corinthians 4:17 NIV)**

And other times he refers to Timothy in an affectionate way. He commends him for his faith and in 2 Timothy we read in verse 3

**“I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.” (2 Timothy 1:3-5 NIV)**

Where did Timothy learn his faith, it was not from Paul but from his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois. This evening we are going to look at Lois and Eunice, even though there is not a lot of evidence to go on we can make quite a lot of statements about them.

The grandmother Lois is only mentioned in this reference in 2 Timothy and we can say with certainty that she has a Greek name which is equivalent to Naamah or Naomi and means *agreeable* or *desirable*. However she did have a faith, probably initially a Jewish faith rather than a Christian faith, but we cannot say. We know nothing about her husband.

However we know that Lois had at least one child, had at least one daughter and her name was Eunice. Eunice implies *conquering well* and was a name expressive of a good or happy victory. Apparently *nice* or *nike* was a favourite ending of female names in the Macedonian, Greek age.

But we read this about Eunice in Acts

**“He, Paul, came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother, Eunice, was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.”** (Acts 16:1-3 NIV)

So what does that tell us? Eunice was a Jewess, but was her grandmother a Jewess as well which is what she passed on to her daughter? We cannot say that but this Jewess married a Greek man, Timothy's father who was obviously not a Jew but a Gentile. How can we tell this? Well Timothy up to this point in his life had not been circumcised. He had reached young adulthood before he was circumcised. Something that I would not look forward to in the same way as baptism!

So we have this Jewess married to a Gentile, so how strong was the faith of Eunice when she was young? Was her husband the only man around, or did her own father give her no choice as to the man she was to marry? None of these answers we will never really know, but we do know that Eunice was living in a very male dominated society, both in the Greek world and in the Jewish world. So it was quite probable that she had no choice as to her marriage partner, but in this she still never lost her faith, and at some time she had been converted to Christianity prior to the visit of Paul to Lystra.

Imagine how hard that might have been. Living in a household where you are the only believer. Having to think all the time about what you are saying, what you doing. Having to please God and a husband.

When Sue and I went to Togo we were quite surprised that in church the women would sit on one side of the church, while the other side was populated by men. It was not 100% but it was certainly very, very noticeable. We assumed it was a cultural thing, but then again Sue and I have not sat together in church for years! However we were told that there was as also a practical reason for the division of the sexes. Quite a few of the women who attended the church were married, but did not do so with their husbands. Sadly their husbands were not Christians and so in some cases they banned their wives from going to church because the wife might find some Christian man and go off with him! So with the division of the sexes the wife could tell her husband that she was sitting on the female side of the church and not in a mixed-seated, gender church.

Maybe Eunice had to do this, or at least tell her husband that as a Jewess, when she went to the synagogue that she would sit upstairs with all the other women as it was only the men who could be downstairs in the body of the synagogue. Maybe this too was the situation in the life of Lois, she too had a faith which did pre-date the faith of her daughter Lois. If Lois had been a Jewess and her husband a Gentile, then we see perhaps in the family some gender role modelling.

This is where the children will follow the behaviour of the parents. So in a family the girls will go to an activity with the mother, while the boys go with dad. Sadly I have seen too often when girls will come to church because their mum comes, but because dad does not come to church, the boys stay at home!

So we need to have some good role models at church of both genders for when children come with only one parent. Did this happen to Timothy? Did he see good male role models when he went to the synagogue and then to church for him to be able to follow? Whether we like it or not whenever children and so a certain extent adults, are around we are role models. Just think about that we are all models, not catwalk models, or models in a catalogue, but Christian models. However we can be good or bad role models, but we will still be models. Hopefully we all strive with the Spirit's help to be good role models.

But back to Lois and Eunice, grandmother and mother. What is it that we read about them in Paul's second letter to Timothy? Chapter 1:5

**“I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.”**

(2 Timothy 1:5 NIV)

Firstly we have that both ladies had a sincere faith. The word sincere there can also mean *unfeigned, undisguised, without hypocrisy*. It was not just a Sunday faith they had, that they put on to go to church, but one that lived with them Sunday to Saturday. It was undisguised and it was not a lifestyle that said

**Do as I say, not do as I do**

Their faith was one that was a 24/7 faith and so a 24/7 lifestyle. For this I love that Paul says of the faith of the two ladies, that it was a

**sincere faith, which...lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice**

(2 Timothy 1:5 NIV)

Their faith lived in them. So what does that mean? I believe that it means two things.

#### Lifestyle

The first is lifestyle. When Alpha first came out there were and probably still are some who do not like Alpha. One such group of people I came across had someone write a booklet called *New Life or New Lifestyle?*. I have read the booklet which is apparently based on some larger tomes that I have never seen and it condemns Alpha for a lot of things but one of them is this in a quote, they say, from a Pastor who says

**One of the problems of proclaiming the gospel in a post-modern world is that culture itself warms much more readily to lifestyle than to doctrine. But the Christian lifestyle is not Christian Faith...I am sure that many people are being converted through the Alpha course, but I have suspicion that some of those people are being converted to a Christian lifestyle rather than to Christ**

But sadly I see many who claim to be Christians who do not live a Christian lifestyle, but I believe that Eunice and Lois did live the Christian lifestyle. It is no good believing in God, talking about God, but not living as a Christian.

This can boil down to some small things. I have said to people, “I did miss you last week at Church, were you OK?”

“Fine,” the person replies, “but we had to stay at home and decorate the bathroom. I had this last week off to do it, but I wanted to get a good start on it on Sunday.”

But the message that went out to the children was, “You don’t have to attend church if you have something else on.” A few years later the parents were wondering why their children did not see church as important in their lives!

For Timothy, he had two people in his life who lived the Christian life, but I believe there is more.

### Words

However I do agree with the author of *New Life or New Lifestyle?* that Christianity is more than lifestyle. I have had people say with great excitement to me, “I have been able to witness today, isn’t that great?”

“Yes, great. What happened.” Hoping to hear some wonderful story for it is always great to hear what God is doing in people’s lives.

“Well I was in the supermarket and the checkout girl looked so down that I smiled at her and she seemed to perk up and smile back. It’s so important to be nice to people.”

I agree – it is, but this is not using words. Along with our lifestyle as Christians, there must also be words, the reason behind our lifestyle. I read into what Paul says about Lois and Eunice that they not only lived the Christian life, but they also talked about their faith to Timothy and probably to others.

Do we talk the talk and walk the talk, because we need to do both. We must let people know what drives us to make the choices we do, to live the way we do – that is where the words come in. However we must also live out the words we speak. Eunice and Lois, mother and grandmother, lived their faith and this had a tremendous effect on Timothy. I wonder and ask myself, what effect does my life and words have on others?