



THE INSTRUMENT OF RESTORATION: A TRUE SON

SERIES: HOW TO RESTORE A CHURCH

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1 Timothy 1:1-2

First Message

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This is a season of change and transition for Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino. On the one hand, we are in the throes of planting a new church in Willow Glen. This new work it is both extremely challenging and exciting. Many are enabled to use their gifts in new ways and attend a church community closer to where they live. As leaders at all levels are moved to new arenas and ministries shift and sort, this has also allowed those of us remaining in Cupertino opportunity to reexamine how we might function if we had a clean slate.

This has focused many of our conversations on answering two questions. First, What are the vital essentials that equip us to be the people of God? And second, What are the forces that seem to hinder us, as God's gathered elect in Cupertino, from being what he would have us be? In the midst of what I might describe as some very animated discussions, sometimes we mount up with eagles' wings, dreaming dreams without constraint, and then within moments we come up against the harsh reality of logistics and quickly plummet back to our earthly mire. Yet on a few occasions as we are dancing between these two poles, someone clears the air and reignites our vision by ushering in a wise voice from the past.

In 1990, one of our elders was concerned that our elder meetings had drifted off course. He wrote a letter to our founder, Ray Stedman, asking him: "How do elders actually come to understand where the Lord of the church is leading his people?" In response, Ray wrote a simple but extremely profound two-page letter detailing what he felt were three primary responsibilities of elders to stay in tune with the Lord's leading. In January of this year, after a tumultuous meeting, the same elder once again pulled the letter out of the archives and read it to the board. It rang with the clarity of a church bell.

For the next several weeks I would like to usher in such a wise voice from the past, one that addressed similar issues and spoke with even greater authority. Today we will begin a new series in 1 Timothy, which I have entitled "How to Restore a Church." The letter was written by the apostle Paul to Timothy, his intimate traveling companion and disciple of some fourteen years. The epistle is a rare gem and wealth of practicality, as Paul confronts conflicts and controversies that seem just as current and threatening in our day.

Here are the some of the issues which the apostle addresses to Timothy:

- How do we preserve the purity of the gospel from the dangers of false teaching?
- Do men and women have distinct roles within the church? If so, what are the dangers in our culture that are blurring those distinctions?
- What role does prayer play in evangelism and God's mission to the whole world?
- How do leaders stay spiritually fresh and avoid burnout?
- How should a church select its leadership?
- How does a church maintain the balance of protecting its leaders from slander and abuse, while at the same time exercising discipline when it is needed?

- How should the church care for the needy in the congregation?
- Since all are gifted and called to serve within the church, how does the church decide who should be financially compensated for their ministry?
- What specific help needs to be given to the wealthy to make them fit disciples for Christ?

This morning will serve as an introduction to the book. First, we will examine Paul's labors in planting the church in Ephesus; second, the threats to this new community which occasioned the letter; and third, we will consider why Paul selected Timothy as the one to lead the task of restoration.

I. Planting a New Community in Ephesus (Acts 18-20)

To appreciate what was happening in the church, we first need to have some understanding of the cultural and historical background that made Ephesus one of Paul's strategic locations for planting a church in Asia Minor. As Philip Towner writes in his commentary, for centuries, Ephesus was a leading cultural and religious center of Asia Minor:

Both its geography, with a strategic harbor, and its worship of Artemis made Ephesus a prominent and wealthy city in the centuries before the Christian era... In the late first century B.C.E., Augustus's quelling of rebellion in Rome brought the pax Romana to Asia. Augustus visited Ephesus and recognized the city as the provincial capital. By the time Paul came on the scene, among Asian cities Ephesus was in the ascendancy. Its population numbered about 100,000, and its economy was robust. Moreover, it was known for its theater on the western slope of Mt. Pion and the Artemesion (the temple of Artemis).¹

The theatre was a massive structure which seated twenty-five thousand people, but its glory was overshadowed by the Temple of Artemis. In 356 B.C.E., the temple was destroyed by fire and a new edifice was constructed over a period of thirty years. Alexander the Great visited the temple when he was just twenty-two years old: "But when he offered to pay the completion of the temple on condition that his name be inscribed on the building, a diplomatic and discreet citizen suggested to him that it was not fitting for one god to make gifts to another."²

Once completed, the new temple became the largest and most magnificent building in the Greek world, so that it ranked as one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. It measured 420 feet in length and 240 feet in width, with its massive roof supported by 117 60-ft. columns. At the heart of the temple stood the brazen image of the many-breasted Artemis, symbolizing her fertility. Tourists flocked from all over the world to visit the sacred site and participate in its worship, which involved cultic prostitution with the many temple priestesses. Like the sensual casinos and sex clubs of Las Vegas, the Temple of Artemis became the foundation stone of the thriving economy in Ephesus, serving as a depository for the wealth of the city.

But just as sudden as our dot-com collapse, so the profits of Artemis were about to plummet. One day an insignificant tent-maker with a few of his friends landed in Ephesus. As he walked on that city's stage of lascivious greed and deceptive glamour, Paul the apostle had other plans

for this city. Armed with the truth of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit, he sought to plant a new community as revolutionary as a new creation.

Ephesus had been on Paul's itinerary during his second missionary journey, but for some reason the Holy Spirit forbade his team from speaking the word in Asia (Acts 16:6). Following a lengthy ministry in Corinth, the apostle first set foot in the city. His teaching in the synagogue was well received, and the Jews asked him to stay longer, but he felt an obligation to return to his sending church, Antioch. In his place he left his newest disciples, Priscilla and Aquila, who had co-labored with him in Corinth, and they continued to preach the gospel in Ephesus.

On his third missionary voyage, Paul again entered the city and preached in the synagogue until opposition forced him to withdraw to a neutral setting. E.F. Bruce gives further details: "[He] hired the lecture-hall of a man named Tyrannus and continued his instruction there. One variety of the New Testament text tells us that he taught there from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m... Probably Tyrannus himself used the lecture-hall before 11 a.m. Paul's hearers must have been infected with his own enthusiasm, as more people would normally be asleep in Ephesus at 1 p.m. than 11 a.m."³

In hindsight we can see the wisdom of the Lord postponing Paul's ministry in Ephesus until his third missionary journey. God's delays are often difficult for us, especially when they seem to fly in the face of logic. Why would God not want to plant a church in the most strategic religious and commercial center of Asia? The answer is that he did, but not until Paul had first established the gospel in cities located in Macedonia in a semi-circle northwest of Ephesus. Then God sent Paul to the "hub of the wheel," where he freely expounded the gospel in this rented hall, five hours a day for two years. Subtracting Sabbath days, that works out to about 3,120 hours of teaching.

While he remained in Ephesus, it seems likely that his colleagues carried on missionary activity in surrounding cities like Smyrna, Colossae, Hierapolis and Laodicea. As a result of this divine strategy, Luke writes, "that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10). Sometimes when God delays his purposes we find that their fulfillment takes on greater dimensions than we could have imagined (Eph 3:30).

What impact did the gospel have in Ephesus? Acts records that Paul's preaching and teaching were accompanied by great works of power by the Holy Spirit, evidenced in a vast array of healings and casting out of demons, whose presence is always prevalent within the occult (Acts 19:11-12). As the word spread, the populace in Ephesus was filled with awe and fear. Scores of its citizens renounced their devilish ways of sorcery associated with the temple by publicly burning their magical papyri.

These texts contained incantations printed on scrolls rolled up in small cylinders which were worn as protective charms around the neck. Luke writes that the value of the magical papyri that went up in smoke that day was estimated at some fifty thousand drachmas (1 drachma = a day's wage, Acts 19:19). In today's terms, using a wage of \$15 per hour, that would be equal to six million dollars! This created quite a stir among the merchants as the value of their "stock" dropped through the floor. The presence of the church in Ephesus now represented a significant threat to the city of Artemis.

The tradesmen, led by Demetrius, a skilled silversmith, became furious. He reasoned that if these people of "The Way" were allowed to continue unhindered, their teachings would bring the economy of Ephesus to a standstill:

"You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in prac-

tically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty." When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (Acts 19:26-28)

Soon the whole city was in an uproar. Two of Paul's companions were seized and dragged into the stadium, where an unruly crowd gathered to take things into their own hands. Had it not been for the providential intercession of the town clerk a riot would have ensued.

As we reflect on these events we must keep in mind the fact that faithful preaching of the gospel will have an adverse financial impact on economies driven by idolatry and greed. If we are truly obedient to the gospel, and allow the Holy Spirit to purge us of all forms of idolatry, we ought to expect persecution from powerful economic warlords, because our lives pose a threat to their pocketbooks.

II. Threats to the New Community

Such was the miraculous beginning of the church in Ephesus. But as our letter indicates, serious trouble soon began to take root within the church. Because it is difficult to reconstruct the exact history from Luke's account of Paul's journeys in Acts, many scholars think that Paul was released from his imprisonment in Rome, where Acts concludes, and subsequently traveled to Crete and Asia Minor to further evangelize new territories and strengthen existing churches. Gordon Fee suggests that Paul took Titus and Timothy to evangelize Crete, leaving Titus there to establish order in the church, while he and Timothy continued on to Macedonia by way of Ephesus. But arriving in Ephesus, they discovered that "false teachings similar to those encountered earlier in Colossae, and more recently in Crete, were in the process of totally undermining the church in Ephesus."⁴ What made the situation so serious was these teachings were not being perpetuated from those outside the community, but by some of the elders. The very thing that Paul had warned the leadership of Ephesus about prior to his departure for Jerusalem had indeed happened:

I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number some will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. (Acts 20:29-30)

Paul took decisive action, excommunicating the two ringleaders, Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim 1:19-20). But, because the apostle had to press on to Macedonia, he left Timothy behind, specifically so that he would "command certain persons not to teach false doctrines any longer" (1:3). Paul hoped to return to Ephesus, but in case he was delayed, this letter was designed so that Timothy would "know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (3:14-15).

Due to the seriousness of the situation in Ephesus, this letter is all business. It is replete with commands and instructions, backed by Paul's full weight of his apostleship, which he puts front and center in his opening greeting:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. (1 Tim 1:1-2 TNIV)

Paul's apostolic office was not of his own choosing, or any ecclesiastical mediation, but by the expressed "command our Savior and of Christ Jesus." To oppose, resist or compromise Paul's instructions given in this letter is to oppose what the Father and Son have designed us to be. So

the stakes could not be higher. This is probably why Paul's greeting lacks his usual thanksgiving. So concerned was he over what was occurring in the church, he simply could not begin with thanks.

The tone is also more detached than the more personal epistle of 2 Timothy. That is because it was not designed as a private letter solely for Timothy's encouragement, but as an authoritative document to be read publicly before the entire church. Luke Timothy Johnson compares it to royal letters from Rome, called *mandata principis* (commandments of the ruler), which functioned not only "to legitimate the practical measures proposed by the delegate...[but also] emphasizing the good personal qualities that the delegate should demonstrate."⁵ Similarly, Paul's letter would grant Timothy the authority he needed to carry out his difficult task of confronting false teachers, as well setting before the congregation the high standards to which Timothy should aspire.

After Paul introduces himself with his full apostolic authority, he names the recipient, Timothy, whom he identifies as his legitimate son in the faith, and then blesses him with the threefold "grace, mercy, and peace," given from the same life spring, "the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." Just as the Father and Son were the sole source of Paul's commissioning, so now they are the single source of divine blessing upon the next generation of those who embrace the gospel. With this divine bracket of holy love and purpose, the earthly father and his spiritual son could not be more united.

III. Who is Qualified to Restore the Community?

The question we need now to address is this: Why, in the face of such dangerous opposition, did Paul choose Timothy as the leader to restore a church in crisis? The apostle first met Timothy on his third missionary journey, when he returned to the church in Lystra. Timothy likely was in his late teens when they met and, being highly regarded by his community (Acts 16:2), Paul decided to take him along on his journey. This was the beginning of a deep and abiding friendship that lasted until the apostle's death.

Timothy's background, personality and stature were not what we might expect of one chosen to be the leading candidate for the difficult task of setting a church in order. First, with a Jewish mother and Greek father, he was a "half-breed," and as such, probably not fully welcome in either world. Second, being in his early to mid-thirties, Timothy lacked the stature of age. The ancient world considered a man a youth until he reached the age of 40; thus the prospect of receiving the respect he needed from older folk in order to lead the church in Ephesus through this crisis was problematic (1 Tim 4:12). Third, as to ambition, Timothy does not appear to be the hard driving, ambitious CEO type, eager to seize the mantle of leadership.

His temperament was shy, sometimes retiring and in need of regular affirmation. Even at the end of their years together Paul has to encourage him to "fan into flame the gift of God" (2 Tim 1:6) within him and not to shrink back from confrontation, because "the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline." (2 Tim 1:7). When Paul dispatched Timothy to Corinth, he made sure the church would be sympathetic to his tender disposition, and therefore wrote them to put him at ease so that "he has nothing to fear while he is with you" (1 Cor 16:10). And finally, as Timothy's constitution was not the hardiest, Paul urged him to take a little wine for his stomach and frequent ailments (1 Tim 5:23).

Yet in Paul's eyes, none of these qualities – family background, age, temperament or constitution – disqualified Timothy from being a future leader of the church. Just as God instructed Samuel not to regard appearance when selecting a king for Israel (1 Sam 16:7), so Paul based his selection of Timothy on the hidden qualities of his heart and the spiritual gifts given to him by the Holy Spirit. His choice proved wise. By the end of Paul's life, no one in his ministry had been as faithful to

him as Timothy. Because of his genuine faith in Christ, he risked everything when the apostle asked him to join him.

In Derbe, he witnessed Paul being stoned by the Jews for preaching the gospel. He knew that rejection, suffering and the shedding of blood were the cost of following Christ, but considered the risk well worth taking. At the time when this letter was written Timothy had been Paul's traveling companion for some 14 years. He had proven himself the apostle's faithful representative, articulating his teaching accurately and faithfully in Thessalonica (ca. A.D. 50), Corinth (ca. A.D. 53-54) and Philippi (ca. A.D. 60-62).⁶ On many occasions he suffered severe hardship, even risking his life and enduring prison for the cause of Christ (Heb 13:23). Paul's deep affection and absolute trust in Timothy is readily seen in how eagerly he commends him to the church in Philippi:

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. (Phil 2:19-23)

Other sons may have deserted Paul and the gospel that he preached, but Timothy was his "true son in the faith." When Paul urges the Corinthians "to imitate me," he further explains, "For this reason I have sent 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 Cor 4:16-17).

As I observe many of the younger leaders God has given us to train the next generation, I'm struck by how many of them are like Timothy in temperament and character. In our ministry of music we have five worship leaders. Like Timothy, they are shy and retiring, yet with hearts of gold they have proven faithful and hard working and have served the interests of the congregation, not their own. We need to give thanks for such gifts.

As we reflect on the introduction to this book, allow me to ask you two questions.

IV. Questions to Consider

1. What are you reading?

John Stott states that the fact that the apostle's purpose in this letter was to silence false teaching

clearly indicates that there is a norm of doctrine from which the false teachers had deviated. It is variously designated in the Pastorals. It is called 'the faith', 'the truth', the 'the sound doctrine', 'the teaching' and the 'the good deposit'. In nearly every one of these expressions the noun is preceded by the definite article, indicating that already a body of doctrine existed which was an agreed standard by which all teaching could be tested and judged. It was the teaching of Christ and of his apostles.⁷

The good news about all this is that the gospel is a "pdf" document whose content has been "locked" for centuries. It is not to be tampered with or deviated from. As Timothy publicly reads and expounds on Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the full authority of the apostle is present by means of the Spirit. And because it is "God-breathed," like the rest of Scripture, it is divinely powerful to make us holy like no other human document (2 Tim 3:16-17).

So my question to you is, What are you reading? There is a plethora of Christian books published every year, and I am encouraged that the quality has been improving over the past decade. We all have authors whose divine gifts have fed our souls deeply, but we must never read

them to the exclusion of Moses, Isaiah, John or Job. We live in one of the most educated places in the world. I would encourage us to not sell our soul short by neglecting the teaching of the apostles. This was one of the major points that Ray Stedman emphasized as vital to finding the mind of the Spirit for the church:

God's instrument for making known his mind is the Word of God taught by the Spirit of God. Elders must be constantly studying the Word and discussing it together: It is not enough to assume the knowledge they have gained in the past is sufficient. Light must spring forth from the Word continually. This studying is to be done individually, by twos and threes, and corporately at meetings of the elders together. When various issues come before them they are to ask: what principles from Scripture bear upon this problem? If they haven't time for this then they haven't time to be elders at all, and ought to resign!

2. Who are you discipling?

Last weekend was my 35th re-union with my Stanford University classmates. The university spares no expense putting on festivities, with world-class speakers for four full days. I have a lot of nostalgia for those special years when I was student. It doesn't take much to trigger memories of student protests and riots over the Vietnam War, the two Rose Bowl victories, or spending six months in an Italian villa in Florence. But the one memory that reaches beyond them all was one night during my sophomore year. I was sitting in a red Volkswagen bug outside my fraternity with my college pastor, David Roper, when out of the blue he turned to me and said he was going to invest his life in me, because he believed I was "a faithful man who was able to teach others" (2 Tim 2:2). I had no idea he was quoting the apostle Paul, but it didn't matter, for that encounter changed everything I was living for.

Before meeting David I was like most college students who were trained from youth to get their worth by creating their own stage, hoping that someday someone somewhere would applaud their quest for excellence. But even when excellence is achieved, the applause never lasts. There is always a higher quest to be achieved, so virtues like contentment, love and service rarely find their way into lives so driven. With a failed gymnastics career, disillusionment with my major and rejection in significant relationships, it didn't take much for me to walk away from the lie into a more significant task, that of discipleship.

Under David's direction I began in my fraternity basement with half a dozen fraternity brothers, studying the gospel of John, followed by Paul's letter to the Romans. Four brothers came to Christ in six months. Then I spent the next two quarters in Italy teaching the same texts, igniting passions that have never gone away. Thirty-five years later, twenty of my old fraternity brothers gathered in a home and shared stories until midnight. What amazed me was that though many of these men have achieved more than their fair share of worldly success, no one talked about what they had accomplished, but rather the eternal values that they longed for, *especially* for their children.

When we spend our lives investing in the next generation, there is no worldly applause, no trophies are given and no degrees conferred, because nurturing little lambs is unseen work. But though it is unseen it is the most fulfilling task on earth. Just ask Timothy.

1 Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 37-38.

2 Peter A. Clayton and Martin J. Price eds., *The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 83.

3 F. F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 132.

4 Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (NIBCNT; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2005), 4.

5 Luke Timothy Johnson, *Letters to Paul's Delegates 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 106-107.

6 Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 2.

7 John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (BST; Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 42-42.

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