



Catalog No. 881

1 Timothy 1:1-7

First Message

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# THE RESTORATION OF LOVE

*SERIES: HOW TO RESTORE A CHURCH*

One year ago, our nation was embroiled in a war to liberate a country that had been invaded by a tyrant. I was impressed by the fact that our political leaders utilized almost all of our military resources to remove the Iraqi forces from Kuwait. And I was impressed by the quality of our military leaders. The briefing by General Schwartzkopf on the ground war, and the secret strategy that pulled off the largest troop movements in military history, was astounding. This was a work of genius. But then reality struck. The battle was over, victory had been won, but the full work of restoration of Kuwait would be an arduous task. The scars of war heal slowly. Perhaps this was best symbolized by the oil fires which raged out of control, transforming the Kuwaiti desert into a living hell.

The tragedy of Kuwait reminds me of what happens at times to a church. A tyrannical enemy invades the flock, doing his worst damage not by persecution from without, but by posing as an angel of light and operating from within. Using false teachers to accomplish his task, this enemy creates division and strife, tearing apart the bonds of love that have taken years to develop. The questions we want to look at today in our opening study in Paul's first letter to Timothy are: How is love restored in a church that has been so infiltrated? What kind of leadership is needed to restore such a church? And what strategy should they employ? How to restore a broken church, therefore, is the theme of this letter. We will begin by looking at the choice of leadership, and what should be leadership's primary concern.

Before we look at Paul's instructions to Timothy it will be helpful to understand the background to the city of Ephesus in order to see the imposing forces that threatened the church. Ephesus was one of the chief cities of the Roman Empire, and the largest and most famous city of Asia Minor. In Paul's day it had a population of 250,000. Ephesus grew to be the major commercial center of Asia Minor and an important seaport. It was the capital of the Roman province of Asia, and hence a center of government. The city contained a theatre that seated 25,000, and a large stadium.

But the most outstanding feature of the city of Ephesus was the Temple of Artemis. In 356 BC, the former temple had been burned and a new temple was constructed over a period of 30 years. This new temple was the largest and most magnificent building ever constructed in the Greek world. Actually it was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It was 420 ft long and 240 ft wide, and its roof was supported on 117 60-ft high columns. The image of Artemis herself was adorned with many breasts, symbolizing fertility. Tourists came from all over the world to visit the site and involve themselves in temple worship, engaging the many temple priestesses in temple prostitution. The temple became immensely rich through such tourism. In the Ancient world, temples also served as banks since they were thought of as a safe place to deposit money. Thus, practically the entire economy of Ephesus was built on this sacred female cult.

Planting a church in Ephesus would be like planting a church in Las Vegas today.

The question then arises, In the midst of such intimidating opposition, who would Paul choose as a leader to restore the church in Ephesus?

## I. The choice of leaders (1:1-2)

**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, our hope; to Timothy, [my] true child in [the] faith: Grace, mercy [and] peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. (NASB)**

This typical greeting identifies the author, Paul, who introduces himself with his full apostolic authority; and the recipient, Timothy, who is identified as Paul's legitimate son in the faith; and this is followed by the blessing: "Grace, mercy, and peace."

### (a) No worldly stature

What kind of leadership does the apostle Paul seek for the monumental task of restoring a ministry of love to the church in Ephesus? Surprisingly, he chooses Timothy, his "true child in the faith," to accomplish this task. Why should we be surprised by his choice of Timothy? To begin with, this young man had no worldly stature. He was half-Jew and half-Greek and, like most half-breeds, was unwelcome in many spheres. Nor was Timothy chosen because of the force of his personality. He was not an aggressive, outgoing, type A personality. On the contrary, he was timid, shy, and retiring. Paul had to stir him up on occasion to use his gifts lest he become passive. Timothy wasn't chosen because he was mature in years, either. He was, perhaps, in his early thirties at the time this letter was written. He was lightly regarded, perhaps even despised by some for his youth. Finally, he probably had a weak constitution. Paul encourages him to "take a little wine for his stomach and for his frequent ailments." Worldly stature, therefore, was the farthest thing from the apostle's mind in his choice of Timothy to spearhead the revival of love in the church at Ephesus.

### (b) Enlightened in mind and heart

What, then, were the qualities that Paul recognized in this young man? First, we will see that Timothy was enlightened in mind and heart. When he first heard the apostle preach the gospel in his home city of Lystra, Timothy recognized that the secret to life was not to be found in Greek philosophy, in the many sects of Judaism, or in the Roman mystery religions. Life, he learned, was to be found only in the risen Christ. Further, he discovered that Christ had entrusted his apostles with his full authority.

### (c) Abandoned in his faith

Secondly, Paul recognized that Timothy was abandoned in his faith. When he became a disciple of Jesus Christ, he was well spoken of by the brethren (Acts 16:1-3). He threw in his lot with Paul, risk-

ing everything when the apostle asked him to join him. In the city of Derbe he saw Paul stoned to death for preaching the gospel, and he knew that this could be his lot too, but he considered the risk worth taking.

#### (d) Recipient of the gift of the Spirit

Thirdly, Timothy had become the recipient of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, thus he was qualified to serve in this manner. Paul had laid hands on him, and prophecies were uttered about his gifts of leadership and pastoring. Thus it was divine gifts, bestowed through the blessing of God the Father, not a fine education and the conferring of degrees that were in the power of man to bestow, that qualified Timothy for the task ahead. And his weaknesses surely would have made him more likely to base his ministry on these divine gifts, not on fleshly qualifications.

#### (e) Faithful in his commitment

Lastly, Paul saw that Timothy was faithful in his commitment. He was the apostle's "true son in the faith." Other sons may have deserted him and the gospel that he preached, but not Timothy. He was a faithful emissary who risked his own life on several occasions, and even endured prison for the cause of Christ (Heb 13:23).

Thus Timothy brings to mind the words of God to the prophet Samuel regarding qualifications for leadership: "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature...for God does not see what man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam 16:7). This is the kind of leaders we need in the church of Jesus Christ—men and women who will renounce the world and its empty blessings and throw in their lot, often at great expense to themselves, for the cause of the gospel. I have a good friend who reminds me of Timothy. He is an excellent student of the Scriptures, but he is shy and retiring, humble and gentle. Wherever I go to minister, he accompanies me. Last year, we went together to his home in Colorado. He comes from a large Catholic family, and as I watched him sow seeds of love among his family members I was reminded of Timothy, this gentle man who was the apostle Paul's choice to restore love among the brethren in Ephesus.

Next, Paul outlines his battle plan to dispossess the enemy from the church there.

## II. Dispossessing the enemy (1:3-7)

**As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may command certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than [furthering] the administration of God which is by faith. Now the goal of the command is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a unhyprocritical faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.**

#### (a) Facing the situation (1:3)

Three things here will help prepare Timothy face these false teachers in Ephesus. The apostle says, "As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may command certain men not to teach strange doctrines." First, he wants Timothy to have the correct perspective on false teaching. "As I urged you," says Paul. Expect it, in other words. Posing an an angel

of light, the enemy is forever seeking to invade the vineyard of Christianity. Don't be surprised, says the apostle; it's going to happen. How should Timothy deal with it? With patience, counsels Paul: "remain on." This would take persistence over the long haul. And he was to do it with boldness. Direct intervention, decisive action is a must: "command certain men not to teach strange doctrines," is the apostle's advice.

#### (b) Knowing the dangers of false teaching (1:4)

Why all this? you ask. We have Paul's answer in verse 4. It is because he knew the dangers of false teaching. They are two-fold: "myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than [furthering] the administration of God which is by faith. Now the goal of the command is love," says Paul. First, the efforts of the false teachers are misdirected. They major in the minors, with their concern over myths and endless genealogies. They are more concerned with what isn't in the Scriptures than what is. They labor over tedious, exhausting minutia concerning something that signifies nothing. Some of the cults of our own day do the same: they are forever tracing genealogies. The purpose of genealogies in the OT, of course, was to trace the seed of Israel. But when Christ, the Seed, the one who conquered sin and death, came on the scene, there was no need for any more genealogies. His progeny are not born of flesh, but of the Spirit. Why waste time with genealogies when the Seed himself has come?

Secondly, says Paul, false teachers foster speculation of the mind instead of planting faith in the heart. I have discovered that this was the weakness of some of the Jewish writings of the Intertestamental period. It is often difficult to discern myth from historical fact. While speculation on such matters might entertain the mind, however, it does great damage to the soul. Unless the truth changes the heart, the mind becomes perverted. Such speculation was "full of sound and fury, but signifying nothing" (Gordon Fee). The Scottish preacher, James Stewart, said that the aims of all genuine preaching should be

*To feed the mind with the truth of God,  
To quicken the conscience by the holiness of God,  
To purge the imagination by the beauty of God,  
To devote the will to the purpose of God.*

This should be the goal of every church.

#### (c) Identifying the enemy (1:6-7)

Thirdly, Paul instructs Timothy on how to identify the enemy: "For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions" (vv 6-7). First, false teachers are consumed with controversy. Forsaking faith and love, they turn aside to fruitless discussion. Wherever they find controversy, whether relational (gossip about someone), or doctrinal (concerning things about which scripture is unclear), they hone in on it. They love to stir things up, to create argument and strife. God, however, gave the gift of speech not to make us polemicists, but to enable us to give a word to the weary for their edification (Isa 50:4).

Here is another way to identify false teachers: "they [want] to be teachers of the law." Their motive is pride. This is manifest in their desire to be recognized. They step over others in order to be first. They seek titles of distinction rather than engaging themselves in a quiet ministry of service that needs no recognition.

And lastly, their speech is characterized by a dogmatism that betrays their ignorance. “They do not understand what they are saying,” says Paul, “or the matters about which they make confident assertions.” Life is not so simple as the formulas they so confidently assert. I’m reminded of the slick television salesmen who tell us we can make millions by buying up repossessed real estate. They parade their possessions before us to try and convince us, but they neglect to say they are prospering on the misfortune of others, violating the commandment of God to help the poor in their misfortune. Life is very complex; it is far from simple. Beware of dogmatic assertions preached by people who do not understand what they are saying. Humility and gentleness, not dogmatism and confident assertion, should be the marks of the Christian’s speech. This was what was to characterize Timothy’s speech, and it would prove to be the most effective weapon in refuting these false teachers (see 2 Tim 2:24ff).

Here we learn that we have far more to worry about with what comes from within ourselves than we do from what proceeds from outside the church. Internal pride, distraction with controversy, and speculative teaching do far more to destroy a church than 300 years of Roman persecution. Paul seldom wept for the church under persecution. In Philippi, as he languished in prison after being flogged, he and Silas broke into song in praise of God. But when the apostle heard about the division in the church in Corinth, brought on by jealousy among the leadership, his heart was so grieved he couldn’t minister even when an open door for ministry lay before him in Troas (2 Cor 2:12-13).

Let us shun controversy like the plague and instead use our speech to bring a word to the weary for their edification. When Michael Green ministered among us recently, someone called me to say he disagreed with something Michael had preached. I asked my friend how many points did Michael have in his message. Ten or eleven, was the reply. “How many points did you agree with?” I asked. “All except this one,” he replied. I told him, “I can’t even get my wife to agree with me on ten out of eleven points! Because of this one thing you’re not going to allow him to teach you and love you?” I asked. I learned a great deal from Michael Green. I learned about the holiness of God. I learned how to pray. I learned how to rejoice in suffering. I learned about simplicity. Let us take the example of Paul and Timothy and shun controversy.

And, secondly, let us beware of pride. Let us crucify our fantasies of spiritual greatness and our need to be recognized, and then go behind the scenes and “visit orphans and widows in their distress.” We have a new widow among us. She called me a few days ago to say that two widows from our congregation invited her to go to lunch last week to share with her how to live as a widow. This was an act of spontaneous affection; no one instructed them to do it. This is how God’s people are to live.

Having instructed Timothy on how to choose leaders, and on the strategy for dispossessing the enemy, Paul now goes on to detail the plan of restoration. Here we come to the central point of this text.

### III. The plan of restoration (1:5)

**Now the goal [or end] of the command [i.e. the command to silence these false teachers] is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a unhyprocritical faith.**

The way to silence false teaching, says Paul, is to re-plant transcendent love in the vineyard. Without pure doctrine love cannot grow in the body. The only hope for the kingdom of God in Ephesus lay in

a community built on God’s love. Notice that Paul is not concerned with the size of the church or with its organizational structure. Is there love in their midst? This is his main concern. Are Christians living merely out of a sense of duty and rules, or are they showing spontaneous love for God and for each other? John Owen wrote, “Life gives power for obedience, love gives joy and pleasure in it.”

#### (a) Love is planted with freedom from guilt

Paul goes on to say that three things are necessary to plant love in God’s vineyard. First, love springs “out of a cleansed heart.” Love is planted when there is freedom from guilt. Many people cannot love because they themselves have never been loved. Through the cross of Christ, however, the flame of God’s love burns bright in the heart and purifies everything it touches. True teaching always leads to confession, repentance, and cleansing. We will not be free to truly love until we have been cleansed, until we know that we are loved by God. On occasion I counsel couples whose marriages are crumbling. They cannot communicate anymore because their hurt is too great, so they come, asking me to fix their marriages for them. But I always tell them they cannot love each other because they have never allowed God to love them. I advise them to go home and pray and fast for a day. I ask them to read the first 39 chapters of the book of Isaiah and write down what the Holy Spirit prompts them to confess is their sin. Then I tell them to read Isaiah 40–66, and to note every instance where God says, “I love you,” and to allow God to love them. Then, if they confess their sins, and allow God to wash them clean, they will be freed to love the one whom they now regard as their enemy. Jesus said of the sinner who anointed his feet, “her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little loves little” (Luke 7:47). When the heart is truly cleansed, love is free to grow at the deep level of the heart.

#### (b) Love grows by sensitivity in relationships

If love is planted through freedom from guilt, it grows, secondly, by sensitivity in relationships. Thus Paul writes that without a “good conscience” love is impossible to demonstrate. I find there is little teaching on the conscience today, but to Paul, maintaining a good (or healthy) conscience was of prime importance. Someone has well defined the conscience as the eye of the soul, recording what it sees. Two characteristics, freedom and sensitivity, make it healthy.

Freedom is most essential to liberate Christians from being bound to legalism as if they were laboring under an arduous set of rules. They feel they are forever walking a tightrope, and they are always afraid of falling. Here is how Oswald Chambers describes this type of conscience: “There is a difference between a refined conscience towards God and the fussy conscience of a hyper-conscientious person without the Holy Spirit of God. Hyper-conscientious people are an absolute plague to live with. They are morally and spiritually nervous, always in terror, expecting bad things to happen, and they always do. Jesus Christ was never morally or spiritually nervous any more than he was physically nervous.” But we can have a clear conscience because we have only one law to obey, the law that Jesus commanded: We are to “love one another.” That’s all. Thus we are free to go about our business every day seeking whom we can love, someone for whom we can demonstrate spontaneous affection.

Secondly, the Christian conscience is highly sensitive because it is empowered by the Holy Spirit to make subtle corrections. This is a primary concern for Paul. If the first question Christians must ask themselves is, “Whom can I love today?”, the second is, “Whom have I wronged?” No longer can we act like a bull in a china shop, break-

ing relationships and offending others. We must be sensitive toward people, gentle and caring for them. If we have wronged someone, we will find that our conscience bears down on us, prompting us to take corrective action. And if we refuse, our enlightened conscience turns up the volume, as it were, to get our attention. Spurgeon wrote, “Give me into the power of a roaring lion, but never let me come under the power of an awakened, guilty conscience. Shut me up in a dark dungeon, among all manner of loathsome creatures—snakes and reptiles of all kinds—but, oh, give me not over to my thoughts when I am consciously guilty before God!”

**(c) Love is harvested with genuine risk**

Once the heart is cleansed, the conscience liberated and fine tuned, then Christians can act with an unhypocritical faith. Love is harvested through genuine risk. The word “hypocrite” in the Greek world was the same as the word for actor. Ephesus had a large theatre where actors put on the Greek plays. The world of Ephesus was filled with play actors, but Christians are not to adopt this role. Rather they are to love others with abandon and a certain degree of risk. Last summer, I took a group of men from our church to a retreat in Canada. During the retreat, the pastor of the church confessed to his men, “I have never wanted to admit that I have been weak in the faith, but I want to say that this has been the hardest year of my life.” As he wept, everyone gathered around him to comfort him. One non-Christian man who was present said, “If church was like this, I would come!” This is what Paul was seeking for the church at Ephesus: a cleansed heart, a healthy conscience, and an unhypocritical faith.

A year ago, the war of liberation in Kuwait came to an end, and the enemy was ousted from the land. Yet I wonder if full, genuine restoration has come to that country. Having spent all that money and resources, has tyranny truly been defeated, or was that war of liberation merely an external one? This, too, is Paul’s concern for the church in Ephesus. Historically, they did deal with the false teachers—they were ousted and silenced—but love never was fully restored in the church. Paul would weep for the church at Ephesus, and so would the Lord. In Revelation, Jesus would say that though their doctrine was pure, they lacked love, and without love they would lose their witness as a light to the community.

If Paul were peering into your life today, would he be grieved because the enemy has invaded your vineyard and captivated you with controversy and speculation at the expense of the main thing, which is love?

What good is it if our minds think lofty thoughts about God, but our hearts are frozen stone cold to his blazing love?

What good is it if we are publicly recognized and applauded for religious service, but secretly we are tormented by a guilty conscience for neglecting our children or hurting those closest to us?

What good is it if we appear terribly busy doing all the right things, but Jesus says of us, “You are merely actors”?

Little children, beware. The goddess Artemis of the Ephesians is still alive and she has many children. To love another person, however, is to see the face of God.

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1 Timothy 1:8-17

Second Message

Brian Morgan

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# THE WAY OF RESTORATION

*SERIES: HOW TO RESTORE A CHURCH*

The apostle Paul's main concern in his first letter to Timothy is that the church in Ephesus be restored to its foundation of love: love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and an unhypocritical faith. The enemy had infiltrated the church through false teachers, some of whom had been influenced by the pagan thinking of the day, and others by a wrong understanding of Judaism. These people were causing havoc by fostering speculation, division and strife, thus Paul responds to this situation by sending Timothy to silence these teachers.

The question we will try to answer from the apostle's letter this morning is this: Once the enemy has been silenced, how does one rebuild, restore, and renew the love that once was prevalent among them? In this text we will discover Paul's answer to this question and in so doing we will discover the basis for bringing restoration to other areas of our lives. How does one restore love to a dead marriage? for instance. How can love be restored in families where children have been alienated from their parents? Or how to we sow seeds of love at work in the midst of a hostile environment? Here Paul sets out a simple but very enlightening strategy for Timothy in his task of restoring love among the Ephesians.

In 1:6-7, Paul wrote that some of the Ephesians "have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions." Today we will pick up his words in verse 8.

## I. Recovering the right use of Law (1:8-11)

**But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted. (NASB)**

Paul begins by saying that when love has been damaged, we must begin restoration, not with grace, surprisingly, but with law. Thus he charges Timothy to recover for the church the proper use of law.

### (a) The wrong use of Law: As a way of maintaining righteousness

Many of the false teachers who were desiring to be "teachers of the Law" were using law wrongly: they were using it for the righteous man. But the law was not given to righteous people to teach them how to maintain righteousness. This kind of teaching, as many have discovered, only serves to foster self-righteousness. It does not restore, but rather damages love through creating elitist circles of people who focus on external behavior, directing the law at others instead of themselves.

### (b) The right use of Law: Reveal, provoke and condemn sin

Why was the law given? Here is Paul's word: "the law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious." The law was not given to righteous people to teach them how to maintain righteousness. On the contrary, it was given for those who in fact are law breakers, not law keepers.

The law was not merely given to reveal sin, but to provoke it—to make sinners utterly sinful in their sinning—and then to condemn them. The apostle begins by saying that the law is made for lawless and rebellious people—licentious people who refuse to be subject to God.

Paul now takes the law and applies the Ten Commandments to conditions in the city of Ephesus. If we place the Ten Commandments alongside Paul's list of the ungodly and rebellious, as he sets those out in this letter, we will see a remarkable correlation between them.

"*You shall have no other gods before Me.*" God desires man's love and loyalty, but man responds by offering his affections to everything but God, therefore he is *ungodly*.

"*You shall not make an idol.*" Idol-making is the chief definition of sin in the OT. Ephesus, of course, was a showplace for idols of every kind, thus it was the home of *sinners*. The economy of the city, as we have already seen, was based on idolatry. If the gospel were to take root there, there would be mass unemployment.

"*Do not lift My name unto vanity.*" "Keep My name holy," in other words. As we contemplate this commandment, we see that we are *unholy* people. We do not treat God's name with respect.

"*Keep the Sabbath holy; do not profane it.*" The law was given to a profane people. Ezekiel 20:13 says, "My Sabbaths they greatly *profaned*." Our society is just like ancient Ephesus, for we too have profaned God's holy days by making them into holidays so that we can worship sporting events, not God.

"*Honor your mother and father.*" The law was given for those who *kill* their mothers and fathers. History shows that Nero murdered his own mother Agrippina after she had poisoned her husband.

"*You shall not murder.*" Life is sacred. The OT laws were designed to protect life. But life was not sacred in the world of Rome or Ephesus, just as it is not sacred in our nation. Who can doubt that abortion falls under the sixth commandment?

"*You shall not commit adultery.*" Paul says, "The law is for immoral men and homosexuals." The brothel in Ephesus was not hidden away in a back street. It was a beautiful, multi-storied building, located in a prominent place in the city. Immorality was condoned, not condemned.

"*You shall not steal.*" To this, Paul adds *kidnapping*, the worst form of stealing. Slave-trading in this culture was common currency.

Child-stealing, as we know, is increasing in our own day. The apostle condemns this.

*“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”* The law is made for *liars and perjurers*, says Paul.

*“You shall not covet.”* Paul concludes: “Whatever else is contrary to false teaching.”

The law was not given to righteous men, but for our wicked society—for the lawless and the rebellious. The law reveals, provokes, and condemns sin so that people might be brought face to face with their depravity. We must be careful in the church to not pervert law by taking the Ten Commandments and offering them to people as a means to attain righteousness. You have seen things like this, I am sure: “Ten principles for successful living,” or “Ten principles for running a successful business.” Seminars like this fail to expound the doctrine of the depravity of man and his only means of deliverance—through faith in Jesus Christ. The law is given to condemn us and to bring us to the realization that we cannot obey it no matter how hard we try. The law therefore reveals our wickedness.

But that’s not the end of the story. Once we discover how depraved we are, and how helpless we are to do anything about it, then we are ready to hear the gospel. Paul continues, “But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully...according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted” (1:8, 11). It’s a good thing to be confronted with our sin and to suffer pangs of remorse and regret as a result. Then we can see how helpless we are to do anything about it.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon has a wonderful word for us here. I will quote from the great preacher’s autobiography:

A spiritual experience which is thoroughly flavoured with a deep and bitter sense of sin is of great value to him that hath had it. It is terrible in the drinking, but it is most wholesome in the bowels, and in the whole of the after-life. Possibly, much of the flimsy piety of the present day arises from the ease with which men attain to peace and joy in these evangelistic days. We would not judge modern converts, but we certainly prefer that form of spiritual exercise which leads the soul by the way of Weeping-cross, and makes it see its blackness before assuring it that it is “clean every whit.” Too many think lightly of sin, and therefore think lightly of the Saviour. He who has stood before his God, convicted and condemned, with the rope about his neck, is the man to weep for joy when he is pardoned, to hate the evil which has been forgiven him, and to live to the honour of the Redeemer by whose blood he has been cleansed.

I wholeheartedly agree with his words. There is much flimsy piety around today because Christians use the law wrongly. We need more law to demonstrate to us our depravity. The Puritans described their conversion experiences in graphic terms, often referring to them as labor pains, of weeks and even months of wrestling with God over their sin. But today, we come so easily to Christ, don’t we? We de-emphasize our depravity, but after we have come to faith we soon discover how weak and wayward we really are.

So recovering the right use of law is the first step to recovering love among a fellowship of Christians, according to Paul. Once we come to this understanding then, where do we begin to apply this? Does the apostle instruct Timothy to go out into the streets of Ephesus and preach this doctrine to the degenerate society around? Where

should Timothy make his first application of the law? The apostle’s answer will surprise us.

## II. Recovering transparency among leaders (1:12-14)

**I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service; even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was show mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are [found] in Christ Jesus.**

Restoring love among the brethren is contingent on recovering the right use of law, and then applying it, first of all, not to others, but to the leadership within the church. Paul serves as the primary example of one who is transparent about his own depravity and candid about his failings.

### (a) Transparency about one’s own depravity (1:13a)

The apostle is brutally honest about his own depravity. Here he freely paints himself in the worst light, toward God, toward the church, and toward others in general, for all to see. First, toward God. Look at what he says: “I was a blasphemer.” In the OT, death was the penalty for blasphemy. On the Damascus Road, Paul learned that he had been a blasphemer all his life. Secondly, toward the church. The apostle says he was a “persecutor.” For Paul, this was a very serious offense. In the OT, if someone touched what was holy, he died. We only have to look at the story of Uzzah. When David recovered the ark and was taking it back in an oxcart to Jerusalem in an unauthorized way, Uzzah touched the ark to steady it and he died because “he touched what was holy.” In the NT, of course, the holiness of Christ is manifest in the church. Paul not only touched this holiness, he ravaged it. We remember the martyrdom of Stephen, and Paul’s part in touching what was holy on that occasion. Thirdly, toward others in general, Paul was a “violent aggressor.” The Greek word here speaks of wanton violence arising from the pride of strength or from passion. The word is used of acts of rape and outrageous violence because the perpetrator is subject to no one. Such a person, the Greeks said, was “above the gods.” In his former life Paul demonstrated outrageous disregard for the rights of others. He was a Rambo-like figure, the would-be Terminator of the young church in Jerusalem and its environs. Thus the apostle confesses his utter failure with respect to the law.

But what does this confession do for Paul? It makes him exult all the more in God’s grace. The greater understanding we have of our depravity, the greater our glory in God’s grace alone.

### (b) Boldness concerning the glory of God’s grace (1:13b-14)

**And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in [or “by means of”] unbelief, and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are [found] in Christ Jesus.**

First, Paul glories in his need of grace. He was shown mercy because he acted in ignorance in unbelief. He is not excusing his sin here, calling it ignorance. What he is saying is, he was ignorant, i.e. he was blind because he disbelieved. Apart from a miracle of God he was doomed. On the Damascus Road the light of Christ shone upon him with mercy so that at last he could see. Secondly, he glories in the extent of God’s grace: it was superabundant. And thirdly, he glories in its effect: grace changed Paul from a man of disbelief to belief, from a man who hated to a man who loved.

So to restore love in the church leaders need to set a free and open atmosphere of vulnerability by being candid about their own failures. Then they can model an appreciation for the grace of God as they tell their own stories. I attended summer classes in Regent College in Canada a few years ago. The professors taught chapel each day, and I had a good friend whose turn came to teach one morning. He began by saying, “I want to teach you of the glory of God. When my wife and I moved here, we had to leave all our support systems—family, friends, traditions. We were left with each other. God placed me in a wilderness and I couldn’t cope in my marriage anymore. I discovered many habit patterns which I had had for years, and I couldn’t change. At first I was in despair, but then God came to me in my wilderness and gave me life.” Because he had shared his weaknesses, everybody wanted to take his class. Now this is what Paul is recommending here. Once you tell your story, you have a platform, a stage, where others will want to join you.

### III. Building a platform for the restoration of others (1:12, 15-17)

**It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost [of all]. And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.**

Rather than viewing his past failures as impediments to future ministry, Paul declares that they actually created a platform for ministry. If God could save Paul, there is hope for everyone! When you tell your story, others are encouraged to join in on the restoration. When parents confess their shortcomings to their children, love is free to enter again into their relationships. The same is true between husbands and wives, and even co-workers. Therefore, don’t be hesitant to share your failures.

The apostle gives three characteristics about leaders that make them attractive to others.

#### (a) Leaders lead by personalizing the truth

“Now I understand the whole purpose of the incarnation,” says Paul. “Christ came to save sinners, among whom I *am* foremost!” Paul did not come to this revelation through his study of Torah under Judaism. It was a living encounter with the risen Christ whose blazing light gave the Scriptures an entirely new meaning that did it. Following his conversion, whenever Paul read the Scriptures, he began to see himself everywhere. He saw himself in the lame man made whole, the blind man who saw, the leper who was made clean, the thief who was forgiven. At a staff study a few years ago we were discussing the story of the ten lepers whom Jesus healed. We discussed the significance of leprosy in the OT and what this might mean in the NT account. As everyone was contributing a different point of view, an ex-convict from Vacaville Prison who had joined us for the day, said, “I think I know what it means. The leper is me! The leprosy is my sin which makes me an outcast from the kingdom of God.” There was nothing any of us could say in reply. He was right. Leaders lead by personalizing the truth. When they do this, everyone wants to follow them. Who among us would not have enjoyed hearing Charles Spurgeon teach about prayer after hearing him recollect his first experience with Christ in prayer:

I remember the first time I ever sincerely prayed. I do not recollect the words I used; surely, there were few enough words in that

petition. I had often repeated a form; I had been in the habit of continually repeating it. At last, I came really to pray, and then I saw myself standing before God, in the immediate presence of the heart-searching Jehovah, and I said within myself, “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye sees Thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” I felt like Esther when she stood before the king, faint and overcome with dread. I was full of penitence of heart, because of His majesty and my sinfulness. I think the only words I could utter were something like these, “Oh! Ah!” And the only complete sentence was, “God be merciful to me, a sinner!” The overwhelming splendour of His majesty, the greatness of His power, the severity of His justice, the immaculate character of His holiness, and all His dreadful grandeur—these things overpowered my soul, and I fell down in utter prostration of spirit, but there was in that prayer a true and real drawing near to God.

Doesn’t that personal testimony give a person authority when he or she leads or teaches? Leaders lead by personalizing the truth.

Secondly,

#### (b) Leaders lead by example, not coercion, out of weakness, not strength

**And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.**

Leaders lead by example, not by coercion. When a leader willingly shares his own weakness, saying that if God can save him he can save anyone, that makes others eager to be transparent. So we don’t have to be in control, demanding that everything is done our way. Let us lead by example and vulnerability. One thing I appreciate so much about our elders is their lack of pretense. They freely admit their weaknesses, and this enhances love. One of them shared with me last week that he had had his worst week ever at work; there was tension in his home; there was tension in the work of the church. He felt absolutely inadequate, he told me, and all he could do was pray. Because he shared with me his weaknesses, my response was to love him all the more.

And thirdly,

#### (c) The demeanor of leaders: Appreciation and praise (1:12, 17)

**I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service;**

Paul is not saying he received an appointment because God thought highly of him. What is all the more amazing to him is that God would ever entrust him with the gospel at all; that he would think of Paul, of all people, as being worthy of this trust. This was truly amazing to the apostle. But this is how God thinks of you and me also. And if we dwell on these thoughts, we will respond, like Paul, with appreciation and praise whenever we serve. God considers us faithful. Don’t you find that amazing?

And God strengthened Paul, as he strengthens us, through the Holy Spirit, to do the task at hand. Thus our lives are characterized by appreciation, not boasting. This is what makes Christians attractive to those who are being drawn to Christ.

Praise is the second thing that characterizes the life of a leader. Verse 17:

**Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.**

Praise for God is constantly on the lips of the apostle. He will have no part in strife and contention, despite the many persecutions and beatings he endured. He is always filled with praise for the unique, unrivalled character of the King whom he served, in contrast to the idols of Ephesus.

So leaders lead by personalizing the truth; by example, not coercion, out of weakness, not strength; and their demeanor is one of appreciation and praise. This is what makes them attractive and draws others to them.

Last week, our nation felt the tremendous pull this kind of love has on the heart as we watched the ice skating performance of Nancy Kerrigan at the Winter Olympics. Her story was one of tender strength born out of weakness. The camera frequently brought us a glimpse of her parents. Her father was a humble welder whose love for his daughter was demonstrated in his commitment to rise every morning at 4:30 to take her to train at the ice rink before he went to work. Then we saw her mother, who is practically blind, staring into a large-screen TV, trying to make out the blurred images of her daughter's performance. We could not help but be moved to tears as we watched those blind eyes filled with love and appreciation for her daughter. And who could blame anyone for wanting to be on stage with that family as Nancy won the bronze medal. The same thing happens in the church when leaders openly share their weaknesses and then are equally vocal about their appreciation for Christ. A great magnetism is created that draws a hurting world onto our stage, whose light and glory is the love of Jesus Christ. May this be our legacy. Amen.

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1 Timothy 1:18–2:8

Third Message

Brian Morgan

March 15, 1992

# TRUE CONTENTMENT FOR MEN

*SERIES: HOW TO RESTORE A CHURCH*

Last week, the father-in-law of two of our former interns died unexpectedly. I attended the memorial service, which was held in a Catholic church. To begin the service, a priest held a jar of seeds in his hands. He emptied out the jar on a plate, and said, “This was Luke Argilla’s life. Wherever he went, he poured out his life in seeds of love.” The most obvious demonstration of such love was Luke’s wife, his five children and their spouses, and 16 grandchildren who were all present. His oldest son and oldest grandson gave testimony to their departed Papa. Many of the 400 people who were there wept as they remembered this man who had spread love everywhere he went. There, in the midst of this valley of high-tech commerce, everything stopped for a moment. A stage was erected, the stage-lights turned on, and we were participants in a memorial to what really matters in life. As a father, I was struck by the fact that no one testified concerning how successful this man had been in his chosen field of business. The only things that were mentioned were that he had loved his wife and children; that he took time to play with his grandchildren; and that he had been a father-figure to many all through his life.

This is what the apostle Paul wants Timothy to do for the church in Ephesus: to bring the church back to a foundation of love in the midst of that decadent, materialistic, world center of tourism, trade and finance. Thus as we come to our third study in this book today, we will learn what the apostle has to say to the men of Ephesus as to their most effective role toward accomplishing this in the church.

The more I study Ephesians and the times when it was written, the more I feel that the pressures of our own day here in Silicon Valley are similar in nature. This is especially true in the area of economics. This ancient city was the center of venture capitalism and investment banking of the world of the first century. Here is how Frank Frost describes these economic times in his book *Greek Society*:

As a previously agricultural community develops an urban, commercial economy, a correspondingly large share of the community’s wealth begins to be converted to ‘venture capital’; that is, it is invested in enterprises promising a brisk return and bearing a risk whose degree can be measured by the amount of interest charged. Some modern economists have estimated that when the amount of venture capital invested by a given community is equivalent to 10% of the GNP, that community has reached the economic ‘take-off’ point—a theoretical stage after which a mild inflationary spiral makes economic growth self-perpetuating.

In the Greek world, the first form of what we would call venture capital was the maritime loan, which grew directly out of the needs of traders for financial backing...as merchants sought out markets and established trade routes all over the Mediterranean. Cities like Athens, Corinth and Ephesus became key ports which served as middle men for trade. The growth and maturity of maritime trade was made possible by the simultaneous development of investment banking, which gradually emerged from

two very disparate institutions: the temple on the hill and the currency table in the marketplace...the first ‘bankers’ were simply money changers who sat at tables in the market or down at the harbor...temples thus became places of deposit and performed almost every service as modern day banks. They kept deposits, lent money to individuals and corporations, sometimes even to sovereign states. Inscriptions found in Ephesus go back as far as the sixth century B.C. describing a large loan lent to King Croesus of Lydia from the goddess Artemis.

The political situation also added new changes to the economic scene. In 146 B.C., the Roman Emperor, Augustus, imposed a peace which was to last for two centuries. This restored much of thriving prosperity in the Mediterranean, but prosperity was selective. The great cities of Athens, Ephesus and Corinth became capitals of world trade, but grew at the expense of the surrounding countryside. Other cities went bankrupt, because the freedom for universal trade between Spain and Syria took out the middle man, making trade directly from Syria to Rome possible.<sup>1</sup>

The economic thrust in Ephesus when Paul was writing this letter therefore was to keep business in the city thriving in the changing times of a one-world economy, times when political rulers in Rome could change economic policy very quickly. In this intimidating world of high finance and political intrigue, some in the church might have looked longingly to the rich, the high and the mighty in order to have influence in the community. Perhaps they felt that if they could just recruit a few from this powerful group to join them, the church would gain standing in Ephesus. But Paul’s word to Timothy, as we will see, is that he should teach the men that they had a far more exalted and powerful position than even the most wealthy venture capitalists. Their role was that of priests—in their homes, in the workplace, and in the church of Jesus Christ. This was one of Timothy’s main tasks, therefore: to recover the role of priests among the men of the church; then they would be effective in the work of God.

Let us begin by reading the entire text.

**First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, on behalf of kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, the testimony to be borne at the proper time. And for this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. (NASB)**

## I. The priority of prayer (2:1)

**First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions...**

First of all, Paul tells men that the most powerful influence they can exert on their world is to be men of prayer. Our own Silicon Valley, as we have pointed out, in many ways resembles Ephesus of old. Ephesus thrived through venture capitalism, while in our own area, the silicon chip drives our economy. Ephesus attracted travelers from all over the world to deposit their investments; it is the same with us: venture capitalists from all over the world are drawn to this valley by the attractive investment opportunities it presents. But, like Ephesus, what this valley needs is not more venture capitalists, traveling salesmen, merchants and engineers; what we need is for Christian men to respond wholeheartedly to their divine calling to be priests.

In the OT, a priest was a man who was set aside unto the ministry of taking mankind into the presence of God. We need to remember that, with the coming of Christ, all Christians are priests and all have direct access to God. This, says Paul, should be a priority in the life of the men of the congregation in Ephesus. Women seem to take on this role naturally, but men have a more difficult time with this. Men, primarily, are the movers and shakers in the business world, but when this competitive spirit invades the church, the life of the body is steadily destroyed as the ministry of the church begins to be run like a business. This is why Paul urges men, first of all, to pray, to take on the role of priests, taking people by the hand and introducing them through prayer to the King of kings.

As we do this let us remember two things. First, priests are more powerful than kings! In our prayers, we all have the privilege of bringing the world into the presence of God. So don't leave the work of the priesthood to professionals! This ministry is for every one of us.

And second, priests don't need an appointment to speak to the Father. When the veil of the temple was torn in two through Christ's death on the cross, we were granted immediate, continual access to God. Now, when people ask you to pray for them, you don't have to consult your appointment book. Pray right then and there, no matter where you are. My father was a surgeon, and whenever I wanted to see him, as the doctor's son, I didn't have to call his nurse for an appointment. Although he had a very busy practice that didn't deter me from barging into his office and going straight into his presence to see him. And when I did, he always stopped what he was doing to make time for his son. It is the same with Christians. Through Christ, they may come into the presence of God, without further introduction.

Thus we have, first, the priority of prayer.

Secondly, Paul goes on to refer to the scope of our prayers.

## II. The scope of prayer: Universal (2:1-2)

**First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, on behalf of kings and all who are in authority...**

### (a) Don't be limited in scope: Remove your prejudices

Christians, Paul says, are to pray for *all* men. For the Jews who had come to faith in Christ, this must have been very hard to accept. For centuries, most Jews were provincial in their thinking, since one had to come to God through the nation of Israel ("salvation is from the Jews"). Their prayers would often be limited in scope (as we find with Jonah's reluctance to preach repentance to city of Ninevah).

But with the coming of Christ, who now reigns over the nations, everyone is invited in regardless of race. Jesus is no provincial ruler: He is King of kings and Lord of lords.

How difficult this concept must have been for the apostles is illustrated in the story of Peter's reluctance to enter a non-Jew's home to speak of Christ. It took three visions and a divine encounter to convince him that God wanted him to go to the house of Cornelius. When Peter finally did what he was told, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were present in the home of the Gentile Cornelius. Only then did the apostle realize that the Spirit was to be given to all the nations. Later, when he reported this to the church in Jerusalem, the Jews were still reluctant to leave the city to spread the gospel, and God had to send persecution upon them to make them leave.

So it was hard for the Jews to share the gospel with Gentiles. It is hard for us to reach out beyond our own kind too, isn't it? We like sharing Christ, but only with our own kind of people. Fifty per cent of my daughter's high school enrollment are minorities, but our church is way below that figure although we're located just a few blocks away from that school. I think that if there is to be a future for this church in this valley, we had better start getting rid of our prejudices and begin praying for our Japanese, Chinese, and Spanish-speaking neighbors.

In summary, Paul exhorts us to not be limited in scope in our prayers, but to pray for all men.

He has a second point.

### (b) Don't be timid: Remove your fear

**prayers...on behalf of kings and all who are in authority**

With its wealth, its idols, its movers and shakers, Ephesus was a very intimidating place for Christians. How were they supposed to have an impact on the city's leaders when the Founder of the church had been executed on a tree, and its leaders were the offscouring of the earth? Furthermore, unlike Judaism, Christianity had no legal backing. Yet in spite of this, God told Paul that he would bear witness before kings: "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel." Interestingly, there was hardly a city or port of call where Paul did not have the opportunity to bear witness to the gospel before those in authority. In Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul on the island, believed when Paul witnessed to him. In Corinth, Crispus and Sosthenes, the leaders of the synagogue, came to Christ in the midst of great persecution. In Jerusalem, Paul spoke with Ananias, the high priest; in Caesarea, he addressed Felix, the Roman Governor; and eventually in Rome, he spoke before Nero. So there is no need for Christians to be intimidated when they witness.

In 1989, I left Romania, fearful and intimidated by the secret police (the *Securitate*) who followed us around in our ministry there. One short year later, however, the dictator Ceaucescu had fallen, and a new government was installed. Shortly afterwards, many Romanian diplomats were sent to the Hoover Institute at Stanford University to study our system of government. As it happened, two members of our body were in charge of hospitality for these diplomats during their stay in California, and they ended up taking these people to church here one Sunday and to our Wednesday morning men's group. The diplomats in turn invited us to stay with them next time we visit Romania. What a reversal! I would never have thought to pray for these men and women, but this is what Paul encourages us to do here.

So men need to take up their most powerful calling, that of priests; and we are to practice this high calling unceasingly, in every sphere, without fear of intimidation.

And what should we be seeking when we pray?

### III. The desired results of prayer (2:2b-4)

...prayers be made for all men...*in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

#### (a) A Christian lifestyle exhibiting inner tranquility

Christians are to pray for all men in order that “we may lead a tranquil and quiet life.” These verses are almost universally interpreted to mean that we should pray for kings and those in authority because they hold the keys to peace. The prayers of Christians, therefore, are to be directed so that leaders might change believers’ circumstances. Now it is true that Paul had a great appreciation for *Pax Romana*, the Roman peace. It made evangelism possible. A common language, Greek, was instituted; and a system of roads was built linking the Empire. But I’m not sure that this common interpretation is what this text is really saying. All four qualities that Paul makes mention of here have nothing to do with circumstances; rather, they are all qualities of the inner heart. And it is bad theology to say that a political leader can regulate what goes on in one’s heart.

What then does Paul want for Christians? He wants *us* to be tranquil, to be quiet and peaceful as a *means to a higher goal*, which is the “salvation of all men.” This is what God is really after. Men are saved when Christians live lives of dignity, godliness and inner peace. Then the world will recognize something different about them and they will seek out answers. But Christians often regard government as the enemy because they don’t enact laws that support our values. It is easy to feel threatened in these days as our country loses its moral moorings. It is tempting to regard certain politicians as the enemy. But we must be careful when we think that lobbying to change laws is more powerful than prayer to convert the hearts of politicians. David, my Romanian friend who visited here recently, told me that under the wicked dictator, Ceaucescu, Christians felt free in that country, but now they are no longer free. Though they suffered severe spiritual persecution and oppression, he says they had a rich spiritual freedom; they were focused and united, finding a transcendent, inner peace as a result. Now that they have *religious* freedom, however, Western values are beginning to infiltrate the church and they are experiencing strife and jealousy among their leadership. My friends long for the earlier days. The key to changing society is for God to change us first in order to bring salvation to all men.

And what should we pray for ourselves? First, for tranquility. This word was used in Greek drama when an actor turned to the audience and, in an aside, whispered his lines. It’s hard for men to learn to be silent, to be quiet and gentle, for that is contrary to the way we are taught to function. But when men act this way, they are able to be fixed, to be calm and unmovable even when there is chaos all around.

The second word “quiet” means the same thing. (Women, take heart here. In the next section, Paul instructs women to be “quiet,” but remember that this is the same word he addresses to men.) He is speaking of a quiet, inner peace. Men should learn to be gentle and cautious in their actions. Are not these two attributes descriptive of the Suffering Servant, who under severe oppression would “not cry

out or raise His voice, nor make His voice heard in the street” (Isa 42:2)?

Then the apostle instructs that men lead lives of devotion; that they be godly in their relationship to God. And they should be dignified, so that their humanity is seen to be glorious and therefore worthy of respect and honor, in contrast to the flip, lightweight response of so many who look for comedy and cheap laughs in everything they hear and see.

This is how Christian men should live. As priests, when we pray, our prayers should not be a demand that others change, but that we ourselves be granted the grace to change. Thereby we will demonstrate an inner tranquility that transcends our circumstances, so that those outside the flock might come to Christ.

#### (b) Leading to an impact on the community

Paul himself is an excellent example here. Before his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road, he was a man of authority, breathing threats and insults against the church. He even had legal documents that entitled him to kill Christians. Now what brought Paul to Christ? Was it the first century Christians mounting a political lobby in Jerusalem coercing Saul to change the edict against the Christians? No, it was Stephen, the martyr, who delivered a powerful speech, with seriousness and godliness, in Paul’s hearing. As Stephen was being stoned to death, we read in the book of Acts, “being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’ ...then he called upon the Lord and said, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!’ and falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them!’ And having said this he fell asleep” (Acts 7:55-56, 59-60). Wherever Saul went, he never forget that prayer. And after he came to Christ he adopted the same approach. When he was brought before Felix in a private audience, he prayed for those in authority and shared his faith in Christ Jesus, discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come. He asked Agrippa, “Do you believe in the prophets? I know you do.” Agrippa replied, “In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.” Paul said, “I would to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am except for these chains” (Acts 26:24, 29). Paul could have lobbied for political change when he was speaking to these leaders, but he did not. What he did, rather, was pray for them and witness to them that they might believe his gospel and thereby undergo the most radical of all changes.

It is not wrong to desire righteous laws, and to work for them, but we must remember that we don’t need righteous laws to make Christians. The government is ultimately powerless to harm or contribute to our cause (Isa 40:15). What Christians should do is pray for the salvation of all men. So men, change your calling from venture capitalists to priests, and as you pray for all men, without prejudice, remember that the secret to their salvation is for them to see your inner tranquility.

Finally, how can we pray this and have confidence that God will answer?

### IV. Our confidence in such prayer (2:3-7)

**This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God**

and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, the testimony to be borne at the proper time. And for this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

**(a) God's desire for *all* men to be saved**

Why can we pray with confidence? It is because God desires this: "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior who *desires* all men to be saved." God longs for all to be saved. When you therefore feel burdened to pray for people, even to the point of weeping, you are entering into the very heart of God.

And how can we be sure that he desires all men to be saved? Paul goes on to say.

**(b) God's character as *one* God over *all* men**

God is the Father of us all by virtue of creation. He wants all his children to know him, just as you want all of your children to love you. If you have three children, is it enough that two love you and one is estranged from you? No. An estranged child produces such grief in the heart of a parent that he will do anything to restore that child's love.

**(c) God's provision of *one* mediator for *all* men**

God not only desired all men to be saved, he sent his Son as Mediator to accomplish the salvation of all men. There is no other mediator designated through whom men can find access to God; therefore if men are to find God, it has to be through Christ.

**(d) The sufficiency of the atonement of *one* sacrifice for *all* men**

God not only desired all men to know him, and provided a Mediator, he also made adequate payment to atone for the sins of all men (1 John 2:2). And by raising Jesus from the dead, God demonstrated that he was satisfied that payment had been made in full (Rom 4:23-25).

**(e) The nature of Paul's calling: *One* preacher for *all* nations**

But once the sufficient sacrifice had been made, reconciliation was still not complete without preachers to announce the good news to the world. So God appointed Paul as an apostle, teacher, and preacher to the nations. Therefore Paul's entire calling is the last stage in a long process for the salvation of all men. The only thing remaining now is the acceptance of this marvelous gift by the beneficiaries.

If you lack confidence in your role as a priest to pray for the salvation of men, therefore, remember that it is backed by the whole theology of salvation history. This is what God has been working towards all along. The only question remaining now is, will you, like Paul, be a priest? There is no more powerful position on earth.

Paul ends this text with an exhortation to men everywhere.

## V. Exhortation to pure prayer (2:8)

**Therefore, I want the men to pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.**

**(a) Be a bold priest**

Paul concludes that he wants men to pray "in every place." Be a priest everywhere you go: in the home, in the office, on the telephone, in the streets, in the shopping malls, in restaurants—everywhere. You don't need an appointment or a meeting; just pray wherever you are. At times, we are shocked when God answers our prayers. Once, after I had preached on the life of Hannah, the formerly barren woman who at last gave birth to Samuel, the first prophet, a woman came up to me in tears. She said to me, "I'm Hannah." I prayed for her, and asked God to give her a child. We went our separate ways, and I forgot all about that incident. Less than a year later, however, she sent me a card to say that God had heard our prayer, and Samuel had been born. We should not be surprised that God hears the prayers of his priests.

**(b) Be a pure priest**

Finally, we come to Paul's last exhortation: "...lifting up holy hands without wrath or dissension." Don't allow the spirit of strife and selfish ambition that permeates our world to invade the church. Let there be no politicking in our prayers. Don't enter into prayer to insist on your own rights and trying to change others. The Jews lifted up their hands in prayer to symbolize that everything had to come from God. So when you pray, look at your hands. Are you praying for your rights, or are you asking God to change you in order that you might lead someone to Christ? At Luke Argilla's memorial, the service ended with communion. Behind the altar hung a large cross, with the figure of the crucified Christ. As I gazed at that cross during communion, I noticed the outstretched hands of the Savior. I suddenly remembered that as Jesus hung on that tree, he prayed not for his will, but for his enemies. There was no wrath or dissension in his outstretched hands, only the nails that bound him to the tree. The nation had their way with him; they crucified him, but he had inner tranquility. As I gazed at that cross, I saw the hands of *the* Priest, and I remembered his prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." God heard that prayer, and he saved you and me.

We come now to the Lord's Table, where we are going to eat the food of priests. As we meditate silently, I will ask each one of you to clasp your hands together and think of the most contentious person in your life. Perhaps it's someone in authority over you, someone who is a threat to you, whomever. In the past, you have directed your prayers to God to change them because you yourself have been unwilling to be crucified so that they might find Christ. You have been trying to be a king, but God wants you to be a priest. Can you now give that over to God and ask him to change you and give you a sense of inner tranquility? When you do so, open your hands quietly and thank God that he has enabled you to be a priest in his kingdom. Amen.

1. Frank J. Frost, *Greek Society* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1971).



Catalog No. 884

1 Timothy 2:9-15

Fourth Message

Brian Morgan

March 22, 1992

# TRUE CONTENTMENT FOR WOMEN

*SERIES: HOW TO RESTORE A CHURCH*

I received a letter last week from a woman in our congregation. She knew that I would be preaching today on Paul's word concerning women in the church, from his first letter to Timothy. My friend has been reading the thoughts of some Christian theologians about women, and I will share part of what she wrote in her letter. She begins by quoting Tertullian, the fourth century theologian. Here is what he wrote about women:

You are the Devil's gateway: you are the unsealer of that forbidden tree: you are the first deserter of divine law: you are she who persuaded him who the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man.

My friend continues:

I first read these words in a college English class last year. I was shocked. I looked around me and saw women—young through middle-aged—hurting, smarting, betrayed by these words (and many like them) which have influenced the Christian Church and the secular world's treatment of women so profoundly. And this is only one example. Is it any wonder that women feel exploited, scapegoated, at the very least dismissed? Why should one-half of the intellectual and creative resources of humankind be so demeaned—and the church has poured gas on the flames? No wonder I encounter women searching for validation: in the cult of goddess worship, in relationships with other women, in militant feminist activities. They don't think there's a place for them in the white male God's world. Black women call themselves "the mules of the world." Anger is the not the first emotion we experience; there is always an emotion preceding anger—if we care to identify it—usually pain or sadness. Angry women are hurt women. Men calling themselves Christians have inflicted just as much pain (maybe more, since they have the truth) as non-Christians. Jesus had a radical view of women, one of honor, respect, equality, and partnership. If Christian men don't uphold that teaching, who will?

Sadly, wrong interpretations of this text from 1 Timothy has only served to add fuel to the fire, as this woman points out in her letter. I hope to bring a corrective word regarding this this morning. First, an important point concerning the context here. The context of this text, of course, is rooted in Paul's instruction to Timothy to restore love in the church in Ephesus. Love was being destroyed by the false teachers and the pagan influences that were penetrating the church. Last week, we studied Paul's corrective word to the men of the church, men who were living in the high-powered, capitalistic world of Ephesus. We saw that his desire was for men to become priests, to learn to lead quiet lives, "raising holy hands in prayer," and not seek to assert their rights.

Today, therefore, we will look at Paul's word to women, bearing in mind the context of his words in this chapter. I will begin by setting out what the Greek world of Paul's day thought about women, quoting from the book *Greek Society* by Frank J. Frost:

The ancient Greeks thought very little of women. They basically treated them as chattel...on the same level with slaves. Wives always lived under the authority, control, and protection of their husbands. Women, especially wives, led lives of seclusion. 'We have harlots for our pleasure, concubines for daily physical use, wives to bring up legitimate children and to be faithful stewards in household matters.' (4th century BC quote by Demosthenes.) This attitude did improve somewhat under the Greek philosophers, who promoted certain areas of equality in education, property rights, marital status (freedom to divorce, for instance), and political

service. But, by and large, the home was her sole domain, where women were expected to master the arts of cooking, spinning, weaving, and child-rearing. Seldom were women allowed to venture outside the home. Even the drawing of water was left to slaves. The playwright, Euripides, gives eloquent expression to women's sense of frustration at their limited existence. Medea complains,

*A man, when he's bored with being at home  
Can go out and escape depression  
By turning to some friend, or whatever.  
But we have our one soul to look to.  
They say we lead a safe life at home  
While they do battle with the spear.  
What imbeciles! I'd rather stand to arms  
Three times than bear one child.*

There were only two realms where women could rise to equal status or perhaps surpass men in influence: as prostitutes and priestesses. The most emancipated women were the *hetairai*, or courtesans (meaning, female companion). She might have started life as a slave, but through unusual intelligence or good luck would have attracted a benefactor whom she could talk into purchasing her freedom. The most famous *hetairai* in Athens mixed freely in male company and are said to have discussed politics, drama, and philosophy with their clients, in addition to providing the usual professional services. But the price of their emancipation was the shame of the occupation, bearing a stigma that they sold sex as a profession.

Nothing gave women liberation to such an extreme as the Roman mystery religions. In the cult of Artemis, upon which the economy of Ephesus was based, for instance, women could serve as priestesses. Artemis was the supreme mother of nature and fertility, the ultimate symbol of female liberation because she needed no male assistance. Priestesses enjoyed great respect in that society. The priestesses of the goddess Hera at Argos were such a universally recognized institution that their terms of office were used to date events. Thucydides precisely dated the beginning of the Peloponnesian War in these words, "When Chrysis had been priestess of Argos for forty-eight years."<sup>1</sup>

In certain ways, our own twentieth century closely parallels the ancient world of Greece and Rome. Through the generations, men in general have demonstrated precious little appreciation for women. For example, men practice double standards in sexuality, while women suffer from limited opportunities in education, in public and religious service. Like the Greeks, we have our philosophers who promise freedom for women, but we are encouraged to accomplish this by having women enter the male world and act the part of males. This so-called equality of opportunity has resulted in a generation of abused and hurt women, some of whom have responded by cloistering together in female cults where they find satisfaction in not even needing men. Even in the church there is great confusion regarding the role of women.

Paul's words here, therefore, are corrective to some of the women in the church in Ephesus. A wrong spirit, brought about through the influence of the cult of Artemis, had infiltrated the church, causing disruption, and preventing women from entering into their high calling.

Let us begin by reading the text. 1 Timothy 2:9-15:

Likewise, [I want] women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness. Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach nor exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, [and] then Eve. And not Adam [who] was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression. But [she] shall be saved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint. (NASB)

The apostle opens this text addressed to women by seeking to help them achieve influence in the kingdom of God. A spirit of contentment is what is necessary, says Paul. He makes use of two areas to express his counsel: first, the realm of adornment, and second, the realm of authority.

## I. In the realm of adornment (2:9-10)

Likewise, [I want] women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness.

### (a) Adornment in dress: Simplicity and purity

In March and April, the great annual processions to the temple of Artemis took place. Thousands of tourists came to Ephesus for these ceremonies, which involved sexual orgies, magical rites, intercourse with seductively dressed sacred priestesses, etc. These pagan religious events were celebrated so as to ensure the birth of healthy children and the blessing of abundant agricultural crops. One problem that arose in the church was that some of the women were dressing seductively when they came to the meetings, thus Paul brings a corrective word here. Our world today has its own cult priestesses, doesn't it? Madonna, for instance, dresses seductively and dances before the cameras to arouse the sensual desires of men. Her lust, of course, is to gain money from men without having a relationship with them.

Paul wants the women in the church in Ephesus to teach their daughters to dress with moderation and purity.

Secondly, women should dress without ostentation. In the Greek and Roman world much attention was given to elaborate clothes, the art of plaiting the hair, etc. Women wore expensive ornaments of gold and jewelry on their fingers, arms and ankles, and in their hair they plaited golden nets. There were two problems with this practice. First, the poorer women in the congregation were made to feel inconsequential when they saw someone dressed in this fashion; and second, the entire practice was a waste of time, because a woman's true beauty was not to be discovered in what she wore.

### (b) Adornment in character: Self-sacrifice

How is true beauty revealed? Here is what Paul says, "by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness." True beauty is not found in what a woman puts on, but rather in what she gives out from a contented spirit. Beauty is found in the home of a woman who invites the poor and the stranger to her table; in the ears that comfort the brokenhearted; in the eyes that weep as they share the pain of the wounded; in the hands that wash the feet of the saints; in the lips that comfort the afflicted. Rebekah in the OT is a wonderful example here. Isaac sent his servant to find a wife for him, and when he came close to Laban's home, Rebekah came out to water her father's animals. Genesis says of her: "And the girl was exceedingly beautiful in appearance, a virgin, and no man had known her; and she went down to the spring and filled her jar, and came up...ran quickly and watered his camels as well" (Gen 24:16ff). Rebekah's purity and service captivated the servant, and he knew he had found his master's bride.

There is, of course, a place for sensual dance, for arousing beauty: it is in the home with your husband. The Song of Songs, however, exhorts younger women (8:10),

I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers;  
Then I became in his eyes as one who finds peace.

This bride is saying, "When I protected my body, when I covered my breasts and made my life a wall, then when the man looked at me he saw that I had peace in my spirit." This is what made this woman beautiful and attractive, unlike the woman who dresses seductively and offers herself for sale.

Where does true beauty lie? The apostle says that women are not to draw attention to themselves in their mode of dress, either by the expense of it or the lack of it. Beauty is to be found in a contented spirit that adorns itself in purity and displays itself in quiet self-sacrifice.

Next, Paul moves from true contentment for a woman, expressed through her beauty, to her authority.

## II. In the realm of authority (2:11-14)

Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach nor exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, [and] then Eve. And not Adam [who] was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression.

### (a) The context of disruption (1 Cor 14:26ff)

We should be careful to not take these words entirely on their face value, otherwise it would seem that Paul is saying women are not to speak in church. Another NT passage, in 1 Cor 14, also seems to be saying this, so it might appear that women do not have a speaking role in the church. The problem with this interpretation, however, is that in 1 Cor 11:5, we discover that women were praying and prophesying in the church in Corinth, and there Paul gives directives to women on how to pray and prophesy.

What the apostle is actually referring to here in 1 Timothy is the practice of disruption in the church in Ephesus. 1 Corinthians 14 is a helpful passage to learn what went on in the early church when they gathered for worship. Paul writes: "When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification...[mutual dependence] if a tongue interpret...and let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent...women be silent" (1 Cor 14:26ff). In the meetings in the church in Corinth, many who had the gift of prophecy (both men *and* women) would give a revelation, and then the prophets would pass judgment on what was said. The problem was that women were entering into this practice and passing judgment on their husbands' revelations (i.e. teaching and exercising authority over men), with the result that the husband's headship in the home was publicly dishonored. Thus there was tension in the homes in Corinth because some wives were publicly rebuking their husbands' teaching.

This was what was happening in Ephesus also. The cult of Artemis had bred an angry spirit of feminism in response to the mistreatment of women, so women were challenging the teaching of men, sometimes even their own husbands. This is why Paul wants women to have a quiet spirit. And this, of course, is what he wrote earlier in this chapter to men: They, too, were to lead a "quiet" life. Paul is instructing men and women how to worship together. When we worship, nothing should be said or done which would cause damage to the headship of the home. Women should not dishonor their husbands in the context of worship, in other words.

### (b) The command for submission (2:11)

Next, notice the apostle's command for submission: "Let a woman quietly receive instruction." The command is a present imperative which could be translated "Let a woman continue to learn." In other words, women were to be free to learn in every environment that was open to men. This was quite unlike the practice in the synagogue, where men and women were separated. But Jesus radically broke this pattern. Men and women are equal spiritually and should be free to learn together. In the gospels, we see that women very often asked the best questions of our Lord. The

conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus didn't go very far theologically because Nicodemus couldn't get beyond the new birth that Jesus talked about. Compare this exchange, however, with the conversation the Lord had with the Samaritan woman. She had no theological training whatever, yet she was taught through the questions she asked the amazing truth of a heavenly Zion which will transcend the earthly Jerusalem. I have learned much from Carleen Brooks, our church receptionist for many years, who is a Greek and Hebrew scholar. Her insightful and challenging questions always stimulate me to think in new ways about Scripture.

Paul is saying that women are to be with men in every arena of learning, but their attitude is to be one of quiet. They are to be still, quiet, at rest, receptive, having a quiet disposition, in contrast to the undisciplined life of the busybodies who interfere in the business of others, creating a stir. For one to hear God, silence is a necessary prerequisite. Ecclesiastes says, "To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools" (Eccl 5:2). Perhaps the best NT illustration of this truth is found in the story of Mary and Martha. While Martha was in the kitchen fussing over a meal, Mary, the theologian, was sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to his instruction. This upset Martha. She felt that Mary was not acting out her proper role (which she took to be working in the kitchen), so she rebuked Jesus—of all people! But Jesus was forced to rebuke her, saying, in effect, "Mary has chosen the best part, learning what I have to say about her. She is content, but you are creating a stir."

So this text is not saying that women cannot speak in church. As we have seen, we have instances where women pray and prophesy in the NT. And it doesn't mean that women cannot correct men; rather, it is referring to where and how they do so. Priscilla and Aquila together corrected the gifted teacher, Apollos, who knew only half the gospel. After hearing him teach they quietly invited him home for lunch and spoke to him in a sensitive and godly way, teaching him the whole gospel. Correction is fine, but it must be done in the proper arena and in the proper manner.

#### (c) The reasons for submission (2:13-14)

Next, the apostle refers to the order of creation in his correction of this boisterous, arrogant spirit that was prevalent in Ephesus. It will help us greatly to remember that these remaining verses come directly from the theology of Genesis 2, 3 and 4. If we see this text in that light, the interpretation will be clear.

First, says the apostle, submission is taught by virtue of creation: "For it was Adam who was first created, [and] then Eve. And not Adam [who] was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression." This order of creation is what gives rise to the doctrine of headship. Eve came from Adam, therefore Adam named his wife, a practice which in the Ancient Near East indicated expressing authority. But notice that Adam did this by expressing her equality. The major theme is Adam's word, "You are my equal," while the minor key is, "I am your head." This is why Paul says women should not dishonor the created order by taking on and disagreeing with their husbands in church.

Secondly, says Paul, this is taught by virtue of the fall: "And not Adam [who] was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression." But Adam was standing by all while this was happening and he didn't open his mouth. His sin was even greater than Eve's because, although he was not deceived, he stood by passively and did nothing. This kind of thing was going on in the church in Ephesus, as we learn in 2 Timothy, where Paul says, "those [false teachers] (by the way, these were men, so don't think that men are not deceived) who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sin, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim 3:6-7). Paul is telling men to cover and protect the women. Don't leave them out there on a limb, he is saying. Protect them and guard them from deception.

The application for us today is clear. We must not allow that boisterous, angry spirit of the cult of Artemis to creep into the church, challenging male leadership. Further, it may be true to say that women who have been hurt by men are more prone to do this.

Paul now goes on to say, in verse 15, that women have an amazing privilege.

### III. Her unparalleled privilege: Giving birth (2:15)

**But [she] shall be saved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.**

The commentaries give five different interpretations of these words, "[she] shall be saved." I think a careful study of Genesis 3-4, however, will make the meaning quite clear.

#### (a) Illustrated in the promise of redemption (Gen 3:15)

Immediately following the fall of mankind, God announced to the woman,

**"And I will put enmity,  
Between your seed and her seed;  
He shall bruise you on the head,  
And you shall bruise him on the heel." (Gen 3:15)**

God promised the woman that from her womb would come a seed, and through the channel of that womb all the evil of the universe would be dealt with. Thus, while Tertullian said that woman was the gateway to the Devil, God declares that in redemption, woman is to be the gateway to the Messiah who will crush the devil and bring salvation to all men! In Genesis, we can sense Eve's joy following the birth of her firstborn: "Now the man knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, 'I have formed a man with the Lord'" (Gen 4:1). The word "Cain" is used often to say "to form or create," as when Melchizedek said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth"; or Psalm 139, "Thou didst form my inward parts." What the woman is saying here, therefore, is, "The Lord formed the first man, and now I rejoice with unparalleled joy that I have formed the second man. I stand together [i.e. equally] with him in the rank of creators" (Casutto). What a privilege! Woman names and rules the second man! Why compete with man, O woman, when you can create a man! In this act of naming, the woman feels personal nearness to the divine presence (Yahweh), the God who draws alongside and comes near to us. This is why we had Hannah's Song read to us this morning. What she experienced in the pain of her earlier barrenness, and later in the birth of Samuel, the first prophet, was equivalent to the education of a graduate student in seminary. And she learned all of this all through the new life that was forming in her womb!

Sarah Edwards, the wife of Jonathan Edwards, America's greatest theologian, bore 12 children in the 1700's. Once a young seminarian, Samuel Hopkins, arrived at the Edwards house in 1741, and he was received with great kindness by Mrs Edwards. "She knew the heart of a stranger," wrote Hopkins. Mrs Edwards encouraged the young man to spend the winter with them. "She had more than ordinary beauty," he wrote. "When I arrived, I was was dejected and gloomy regarding my spiritual condition, but her speech so lifted my spirit that I doubted whether the cordiality and ready conversation of Mrs. Edwards was capable of being matched by her husband."<sup>2</sup>

Where did this ability to speak and encourage come from? A glance at her diary reveals the source of Sarah's beauty of spirit:

Thursday night Jan. 28 was the sweetest night I ever had in my life. I never before, for so long a time together, enjoyed so much of the light, and rest, and sweetness of heaven in my soul...The great part of the night I lay awake, sometimes asleep, and sometimes between sleeping and waking. But all night I continued in a constant, clear and lively sense of the heavenly sweetness of Christ's excellent and transcendent love, of his nearness to me, and of my dearness to him; with an inexpressible sweet calmness of soul in an entire rest in him...So far as I am capable of making a comparison, I think that what I felt each minute, during the continuance of the whole time, was worth more than all the outward comfort and pleasure which I had enjoyed in my whole life put together. It was pure delight, which fed and satisfied the soul. It was pleasure, without the least sting, or any interruption. It was sweetness,

which my soul was lost in. It seemed to be all that my feeble frame could sustain, of that fulness of joy which is felt by those who behold the face of Christ, and share his love in the heavenly world...I had a deep sense of the awful greatness of God, and felt with what humility and reverence we ought to behave ourselves before him.”<sup>22</sup>

I have had moments of such ecstasy, but here Sarah Edwards writes that she spent an entire night enraptured with Jesus Christ. So who would you rather hear from this morning, Sarah Edwards or me?

Thus Paul says that this wonderful act of Eve’s giving birth set in motion the plan of salvation for the whole earth.

He illustrates this not only in the promise of redemption, but also in its pain.

#### (b) Illustrated in the pain of redemption (Gen 3:16; 4:1-7, 25)

**But [she] shall be saved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint. (1 Tim 2:15)**

Again, we will refer to Genesis 3 to help us interpret this text. There God said to the woman that her role would not be to compete with, but rather to create a man. But this role would be a painful one. God said,

**“I will greatly multiply  
Your pain in childbirth,  
In pain you shall bring forth children.” (Gen 3:16)**

We know what happened, of course, Eve lost both of her sons. One was a murderer, the other a victim: “Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.” And the murderer became a wanderer. To escape his sense of alienation from God he built the first city, but he did so only to escape from the wrath of God. This was what Eve had to live with: the pain of childbirth.

But the story doesn’t end there. Eve continued in faith: The they in verse 15 refers not to children, but to women. Women will find salvation if they “continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.” Eve continued to believe that if God made a promise to use her womb with a seed that would crush the serpent, culminating in the Messianic King, she would continue to believe, even through the pain. So she starts all over again: “And Adam had relations with his wife again; and she gave birth to a son, and name him Seth [Hebrew: foundation] for she said, ‘God has appointed me another seed in the place of Abel; for Cain killed him.’ And to Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh [weak, or sick]. Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD.” Through the pain, Eve’s faith brought forth a new seed (Seth: “new foundation”) and would give birth to a line of men who knew they were weak. When men know that they are weak, then they “begin to call upon the name of the LORD.” Women’s role is a painful one—giving birth—but if they continue in faith, God will do new things through their pain, birthing a whole new generation of men and women who in their weakness feel they must learn to pray, and from those prayers will come the salvation of the world. This is what Eve learned.

#### (c) Application in the New Covenant

Thus Paul’s word to women is, don’t compete with men. So what if you can’t run an Iron Man triathlon as fast as a man, you can do something no one else can do: you can give birth to new things for the next generation. With the advent of Christ and the birth of the new kingdom, the prophet Isaiah cried,

**“Shout for joy, O barren one, you who have borne no child,  
Break forth into joyful shouting and cry aloud, you who have not  
travailed;  
For the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous,  
Than the sons of the married woman,” says the Lord. (Isa 54:1)**

In the age of the Spirit, even the unmarried and the barren woman can have countless sons and daughters in the kingdom of God. Why do you

think women were the first witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, bringing news of the birth of a new kingdom? It was because God was teaching women that they are the divine vessels to birth (initiate) the kingdom. Why compete with men for a ministry when you can birth your own?

On this very point, as I studied this text I thought about the many ministries that have been birthed by the women here at Peninsula Bible Church. A few years ago, we had a tremendous ministry to the Vietnamese boat people. Scores of Vietnamese came to church one evening each week to learn English and be cared for. One woman, Sue Lindstedt, a teacher, through her love for these people, initiated this entire ministry. East Palo Alto today is a war zone of shootings and drug dealing. There are more murders per capita in that city than in any city in the United States. Right in the center of the city, in one of the most dangerous areas, the Cooley Apartments, a ministry to children of minorities was begun by Joanie Tankersley. If you want to be initiated in the Biblical languages at PBC, to whom do I send you? For Greek, to Lynne Fox, Jennifer Berenson, and Dana Harris; for Hebrew, Lynne Fox and Merilyn Copland. In fact, some of my best devotional times with the Lord this year have been studying under Merilyn as she has initiated many of our leaders and pastors here in the nature of Hebrew thought. Who oversees 200 teachers and aides who minister to our more than 600 grade school and younger children? Our children’s pastor, Jane Alexander. And who birthed an entire ministry to the refugees of Eastern Europe, sought them out, fed them, clothed and brought them to church? It was Ethel Smith. Pat Patmor and Mary Ann Barnett began *Shepherding the Wounded*, a needed counseling ministry to women in our days of wounded women. The local Crisis Pregnancy Center was started by Marion Recine. Now Connie David and Muriel Thompson lead that ministry. Discovery Publishing was the vision of Betty Berte and Colleen Kuhlman. They decided to type a manuscript of a sermon and print a few copies, and this gave birth to Discovery Publishing. Grace Bunce is our hospitality leader here in PBC. Moms In Touch, a group that prays for our children who attend public schools, was begun by Terry Burns and Yvonne Hyatt. All of these women, and others among us, were doing something men cannot do: initiating and giving birth to new things that God had laid on their hearts.

The tragedy is that, in correcting the abuse of misplaced beauty and authority that sprang from the cult of Artemis, men have forgotten the greater beauty of women and demeaned their greater purpose. Tertullian said, “You are the Devil’s gateway: you are the unsealer of that forbidden tree: you are the first deserter of divine law: you are she who persuaded him who the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God’s image, man.” But on behalf of my brothers, I would like to repent and say to you, my sisters, “You are the Messiah’s gateway, the planter of the tree of life, He who would crush the serpent; you are the first to glory in His face, the first to hear Him speak the Divine Law, the first to weep over his blood; your loving hands brought him down from the tree; you were the first to have your sorrow turned into joy, to see the new age upon the earth; your feet were the first to carry the gospel, and your tongue the first to proclaim it, saying, “Rejoice, He is risen, and all men can be remade in His image.” And when He comes again, we men will gladly lay aside our role to join you in yours, and together we shall walk down the aisle as His radiant Bride.

O sisters, forgive us, your brothers, for our eyes have been blind to the glory He has shared with you. Amen.

1. All background taken from Frank J. Frost, *Greek Society* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1991), 90-94.

2. Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth), 195-196.



Catalog No. 885

1 Timothy 3:1-7

Fifth Message

Brian Morgan

March 29, 1992

# HOW TO CHOOSE LEADERS

*SERIES: HOW TO RESTORE A CHURCH*

In this election year, it is evident that there is a certain sadness and frustration abroad over the character of many of our political leaders. Almost daily we hear revelations of new scandals. Some men of integrity in Congress are resigning because they feel there is no hope for change for the better. And there is a lot of confusion regarding the character traits that go into making a good leader. People are even confused as to whether a leader's personal life affects his ability to lead. Never in our history, it seems, has our country been so lacking in people of quality in leadership.

The issue of leadership in the church is the theme of the passage to which we come today in our studies in the apostle Paul's first letter to Timothy. To help set the stage for our study, it will be beneficial to learn something of the political life of the first century. I will read from Philip Schaff's *History of the Christian Church*:

When Christianity took its foothold on the earth, the pagan civilization and the Roman Empire had reached their zenith. The fairest countries of Europe, and a considerable part of Asia and Africa, stood under one imperial government with republican forms, and enjoyed a well-ordered jurisdiction...But this is only the surface view. This imposing show concealed incurable moral putridity and indescribable wretchedness...Never was there any age or any place where the worst forms of wickedness were practised with a more unblushing effrontery than in the city of Rome under the government of the Caesars. The pagan historians of Rome have branded and immortalized the vices and crimes of the Caesars: the misanthropy, cruelty, and voluptuousness of Tiberius; the ferocious madness of Caius Caligula, who had men tortured, beheaded, or sawn in pieces for his amusement, who seriously meditated the butchery of the whole Senate, raised his horse to the dignity of consul and priest, and crawled under the bed in a storm; the bottomless vileness of Nero, 'the inventor of crime,' who poisoned or murdered his preceptors Burrhus and Seneca, his half-brother and brother-in-law Britannicus, his mother Agrippina, his wife Octavia, his mistress Poppaea, who in sheer wantonness set fire to Rome, and then burnt innocent Christians for it as torches in his gardens, figuring himself as charioteer in the infernal spectacle; the refined wickedness of Domitian, who, more a cat than a tiger, amused himself most with the torment of the dying and with catching flies; the shameless revelry of Commodus with his hundreds of concubines, and ferocious passion for butchering men and beast in the arena; the mad villainy of Heliogabalus, who raised the lowest men to the highest dignities, dressed himself in women's clothes, married a dissolute boy like himself, in short, inverted all the laws of nature and of decency, until at last he was butchered with his mother by the soldiers, and thrown into the muddy Tiber. And to fill the measure of impiety and wickedness, such imperial monsters were received, after their death, by a formal decree of the Senate, in the number of divinities, and their abandoned memory was celebrated by festivals, temples, and colleges of priests! The emperor was at once a priest, an atheist, and a god.

The wives and mistresses of the emperors were not much better. They revelled in luxury and vice, swept through the streets in chariots drawn by silver-shod mules, wasted fortunes on a single dress, delighted in wicked intrigues, aided their husbands in dark crimes. Messalina, the wife of Claudius, was murdered by the order of her husband in the midst of her nuptial orgies with one her favorites; and the younger Agrippina, the mother of Nero, after poisoning her husband, was

murdered by her own son, who was equally cruel to his wives, kicking one of them to death when she was in a state of pregnancy. These female monsters were likewise deified, and elevated to the rank of Juno or Venus.<sup>1</sup>

Reading this puts our problems with leadership in much better perspective, doesn't it? Now in the midst of this terrible moral decadence, presided over by the first century Roman Caesars, God through the cross of Jesus Christ was planting his kingdom of light and beauty and holiness. In this letter, Paul instructs Timothy, his young son in the faith, to look for men of impeccable character, who were devoted to godliness, to oversee the church in the city of Ephesus. It is hardly necessary to say that the kind of leaders Paul was recommending neither needed nor sought encouragement from their society to be godly. It is the cross, and the cross alone, that makes men and women holy. Further, the apostle's primary concern is not how church should be run, but who runs it. He begins his instructions, therefore, with a word on the biblical qualifications for elders and deacons.

## I. What is an Elder? (3:1)

**Faithful is the word, if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. (NASB)**

Before we look at the qualifications of an "overseer," the word Paul uses here, it will be helpful to define the kind of office he is referring to. The New Testament uses three distinct words to describe three different aspects of the same office.

### (a) A pastor-teacher who feeds the flock

First, an overseer is a pastor-teacher, a *shepherd* who leads the flock of God to good pasture. There, in an atmosphere of protection and rest, the sheep may be fed and strengthened. The life of Christ is mediated to such men by his word, thus as pastors their primary function is to feed the flock with God's word.

### (b) An elder with experience and character

Second, he is described as an *elder*. This word speaks of the individual's experience and godly character. There may have been many gifted shepherds in the body at Ephesus, but there were some more experienced. In age of Spirit, however, maturity can come at a young age, thus Paul counsels Timothy, "Let no one look down on your youth [he was probably in his mid-thirties], but be an example."

### (c) An overseer who watches

Third, the word *overseer* is descriptive of a shepherd's call to watch and guard the flock of God. This word is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to describe God himself. He watches over Israel, his flock, with tender care, and intercedes from heaven to earth to "visit" his people with salvation or judgment (Ps 17:3; 65:9; 89:32; 106:4; Jer 29:10; Luke 1:68; 7:16).

Following the example of Acts 15, the elders of Peninsula Bible Church have adopted the principle of unanimity in their task of watching over the flock entrusted to their care. During the Council at Jerusalem, the apostles were trying to find the mind of the Lord so as to not impose their views on the church, but rather to discover what God wanted them to say and do. Thus we read in Acts 15:25,28, "it seemed good to us, having become of one mind" (25), "for it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (28). We have seen this principle of unanimity in decision-making

operate among our elders throughout the history of PBC as they seek to discover what the Lord would have them do in the many decisions they face.

Overseeing a flock requires not only gift and experience, but also calling, as Paul charged the Ephesian elders on an earlier occasion: “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). Of course, we now know that a drastic change occurred later in church history when the Catholic church applied these three terms to three different offices. The concepts of equality and plurality changed, and the Catholic church became a hierarchy, with priests, elders and bishops, followed later by the popes. But this was not the original vision of the church in the book of Acts.

#### (d) An honorable work

Lastly, says Paul, “Faithful is the word, if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do” (3:1). Calvin believed that the phrase “Faithful is the word,” was an ancient proverb of Plato (“The difficult things are the good things”), meaning, things that are excellent are also arduous and difficult. Thus, if in chapter 2 Paul said it was not appropriate for a woman to pass judgment publicly on the teaching of men (“to teach or exercise authority over a man”), then it is not appropriate for most men either, for this is the job of elders, a select group of men chosen by the Holy Spirit. It is no light matter to represent God’s Son and to care for his church “which He purchased with His own blood.”

Paul therefore says the task of overseer is a fine work. But desire is not enough, for the office is a high calling, an arduous, demanding position.

So we move to his next point.

## II. What are the qualifications of Elders? (3:2-7)

**An overseer, then, must be above reproach, a one-woman kind of man, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine, or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money, managing his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.**

Given the background of the decadent Roman Empire, which we referred to earlier, we can only imagine the impact that Paul’s list of qualifications for leadership in the church must have made on the Ephesian Christians.

#### (a) Personal character: Above reproach

Here the apostle uses 12 adjectives to describe the character requirements for leaders. (Perhaps the number 12 is symbolic of “leaders,” reminiscent of the 12 tribes of Israel.) The first character trait summarizes all of the others: elders must be “above reproach.” This is not speaking of perfection; rather it is referring to the set of one’s sail. Elders must be headed in the right direction in all of these areas. Unlike the Roman political leaders, elders were not to be marked by any kind of disgrace as this would limit their authority among the flock.

Second, an elder must be “a one-woman kind of man” (“the husband of one wife”), a man who is singlemindedly committed to one relationship. Neither sexually nor in his thought-life does he wander, but with faithfulness he is committed to one woman. Not many men fitted this category in Ephesus, a city whose economy was based on the lust of the eyes and sacred prostitution. Demosthenes wrote, “We have harlots for our pleasure, concubines for daily physical use, wives to bring up legitimate children and to be faithful stewards in household matters.” A faithful husband would certainly stand out in that decadent society.

The third and fourth character traits describe self-control in one’s thinking: an elder is to be “temperate and prudent.” “Temperate” was

used originally with respect to the use of drink, but because this topic is listed again later, I think Paul is saying here that an elder must be clear in his thinking. He must be clear-headed, and thus free from distraction and cloudy thinking. He is so well founded on the truth of Scripture that he is alert and stable. He must maintain vigilant watch over the flock, and he is keenly aware of Satan’s presence and malevolence.

Fourth, an elder is “prudent.” This word is used of the formerly demon-possessed man in the gospels. When Jesus healed him, he was said to be clothed and “in his right mind.” This word speaks of one who is in possession of his own thinking. He is not “tossed around by every wind of doctrine.” He thinks clearly, not irrationally; he is reasoned and realistic. In California, we have new systems for living and self-actualization being invented every day. There is always a new book available to help people accomplish this, but when an elder is given this book to read, he quickly discerns that this is old stuff dressed in new clothing to make it seem viable. Like a great gymnast who is constant control of his body during his program, since it is fraught with danger, an elder must always be in control of his thoughts as he exercises oversight over the flock; realizing the danger, he must be temperate and prudent.

Fifth, an elder is to be “respectable.” From the Greek word comes the word cosmos. An elder must be “well-ordered and organized.” Before the universe was created there was chaos, but when God began his creative work, the first thing he did was create order and beauty from the chaos. Order is a characteristic of anything that is beautiful. An elder must speak in an orderly way, his words well arranged. He pays his bills in an orderly way; his business is not run in a slipshod fashion.

Sixth, he is to “hospitable” (literally “a lover of strangers”). This does not mean having his best friends over for dinner to reciprocate their hospitality, but rather that he actively pursues strangers and newcomers, keeping his home open and ready to receive them. This would be particularly valuable in times of persecution in the first century when teachers could not lodge anywhere but in Christian homes. Even in our own day we experienced this in Romania, where the brethren placed themselves in danger on many occasions by housing us. Our space limitations here at PBC/Cupertino make this character trait an essential among many in the flock. If homes were not open to the body, we would not have home fellowships, newcomers classes, college or singles ministries. Hospitality, therefore, is a marvelous gift to the body of Christ. Church life grows and flourishes in the homes of the saints.

Seventh, Paul says that an elder must be “able to teach.” We will bypass this for the moment and return to it later.

Eighth, an elder is “not addicted to wine.” He may be free to drink wine, but he is free from alcohol’s claim on him. Thus he is also free from violence, immorality, abuse, and all the other tragic things that often accompany the lack of control and judgment that arise from drunkenness.

The ninth through eleventh traits refer to the manner in which an elder accomplishes tasks—his management skills, in other words. He is, first, “not pugnacious.” He is not a bully, a striker or a brawler. This word was used of a cock’s spur or a goad. In this context, it is describing someone who has his guns at the ready, filed to hair-trigger sensitivity, to blow away anyone who crosses his path. Whenever you ask someone like this a question, you get the whole book thrown at you. Once I was having a conversation with a friend, and another person joined us. My friend asked a question about theology, and this other man immediately began to dump an entire 12-point outline on him. When he finally finished his answer, my friend meekly asked, “Apart from that, you have no opinion, I take it?” An elder must not come on like this. And second, he is “gentle.” There is a sweetness about him that makes him approachable. He has a pleasant demeanor when someone knocks on his door. He is willing to yield to other points of view, and remains meek in the face of insults. Calvin wrote that an elder “bears injuries peacefully and with moderation, who excuses much, who swallows insults, who does not make himself dreaded for his harsh severity, nor rigorously exact all that is due to him.” And an elder is to be “uncontentious.” He is to be a peace lover, not a fighter. If a battle is brewing, he stays away. He avoids

conflict like the plague. He shuns fleshly controversy, contending only for the few things God has commanded Christians to fight for. Peaceful relationships are much more important to him than winning a battle of words. When emotions boil over in meetings, he chooses love rather than making a point. David Roper, a former pastor at PBC, exhibited this character trait better than anyone I have ever known. He refused to contend and enter into verbal battles if relationships were threatened. This is the kind of spirit an elder is to have as he leads. Perhaps this is not a very efficient management style. You can get things done by pushing through and steamrolling your viewpoint, but God is not concerned with efficiency in the church. Love relationships among the body are his concern.

The twelfth quality a leader must have is that he is “free from the love of money.” He is not greedy, but is content with what God has given him. He does not pervert the gospel by making people pay for it. He will not use his office for personal advancement. When Michael Green ministered among us recently, he made no financial demands of any kind during an entire week when he poured out his life among us. I noticed that his shoes were worn through and he did not have another pair, so I bought him a pair. He was overwhelmed at the gesture. When he and the team were getting ready to board the plane to fly back to Canada, he went through his briefcase to make sure he did not have anything that belonged to us, things like pens, notepads, etc. Elders must never use their office for personal advancement. They feed others, and then God feeds them.

Thus we have Paul’s list of a leader’s personal traits, which demonstrate an impeccable personal life.

#### (b) Divine gifts

The leader needs these character traits, but he also needs gifts. He is to be “apt to teach.” Paul amplifies this in his letter to Titus in these words, “in order that he might be able both to exhort in sound doctrine, and to reprove those who contradict” (1:9). He must have the ability through his gift to be able to communicate divine truth in both favorable and unfavorable circumstances. Paul is speaking in a much broader sense than merely referring to the gift of teaching. Leaders would be a very narrow lot if the gift of teaching was required of all of them. There are many spiritual gifts that are suited to teaching. Of the 21 spiritual gifts, 16 to 18 are speaking gifts—for instance, wisdom, leadership, knowledge, etc. All Christians are gifted, and most have some speaking gifts. I find it intriguing that the apostle places this gift of teaching in the middle of his list of personal character traits. Why is it not placed by itself and highlighted in a separate category? I wondered. I think it is because the Spirit has distributed his gifts liberally—everyone is gifted—but those individuals who are outstanding in character have worked diligently to develop their gift. They take time to study; they work hard, refusing to rely on intuition alone. Our worship team today led us marvelously, but they worked diligently to prepare for this service. They are gifted, but that in itself is not enough; they practiced hard. Communicating truth is demanding work. Elders and leaders are those who have worked diligently to develop their gifts. They have excellent habits of reading, studying and prayer. They refuse to be shoddy in their preparation, thus they are men of proven character. They are like Ezra: “the good hand of his God was upon him. For Ezra had set his heart to seek [study] the law of the Lord, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:9b-10).

Thus we have here the character traits of elders, and a word on their speaking gifts which they have been studious to develop.

Finally, we have a section on their experience. Where are elders made? Where is their proving ground?

#### (c) The proving ground

Here is the apostle’s word: “managing his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)”

First, an elder’s household is well managed. What determines this is not how neat the home is, but the grace of his children, who should be “under control with all dignity.” “Dignity” suggests that his children are submissive because they honor their father. There is only one way to acquire honor: it comes because you have loved your children and spent time with them, as opposed to keeping them in control through bullying and brute force. Children are weak and defenseless. How you treat them will demonstrate how you will care for the weak, the orphans and widows in the church. An elder must ask himself, are my children afraid of me, or do they respect me?

Second, an elder has experience in years. He is “not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation of the devil” (3:6). Literally, this means an elder must not be a newly planted person. His roots must go deep into the soil of Scripture and experience. New converts, because they are zealous for Christ, can become proud if responsibility is given to them too early. We need to let people grow naturally. Para-church organizations sometimes make the mistake of taking well-known people who have come to Christ—athletes, for instance—and parading them all over the country in speaking engagements. A friend of mine at Stanford University saw through the hypocrisy of football players who were unconverted, yet they were giving their testimonies to groups. The result was that this man forsook his faith and has never returned. The elder needs experience in years.

And thirdly, he must have experience in the community: “And he must have a good reputation with those outside, so that he may not fall in reproach and snare of the devil” (3:7).

It is a trap set by the devil to have the leader’s behavior slandered so as to make people disinclined to hear the gospel. We hardly need to list any examples of this type of thing. In Ephesus, the greed and abusive conduct of false teachers was bringing disgrace on the church. This behavior so affected Paul that when he went to Thessalonica, he refused to take anything for his support in order to put an end to the rumors (1 Thess 2:9). A young man needs to spend time developing a good reputation in the community, paying his taxes on time, developing good work habits, spending time with his children, etc., before he becomes an elder. Any violation of this fosters great evil in the church.

Timothy is thus to recognize what God has already done in developing leaders in Ephesus through the ministry of his word. Leaders are men of impeccable character, divinely gifted, of proven experience, both in the home and in the community. When Timothy recognized such men in the church, he would know that they were already elders; all that was left for him to do was recognize what God had already done.

### III. Implications for leadership

I will draw three implications for leadership in the church.

#### (a) The priority of character over gift

Here we find a theological development as we move from the Old Testament to the New Testament. In the book of Judges in the OT, the gift of the Spirit was frequently bestowed upon an individual unto a ministry (say, deliverance from Israel’s enemies), but that gift bore little or no relationship to the character of the individual in question. Take Samson, for instance. He was a lustful, Rambo-like beast of a man, yet the Spirit descended upon him for the task of delivering the nation from the Philistines. Saul, the first king in Israel, destroyed the nation’s enemy, the Ammonites, yet he ended his life as a paranoid maniac, committing suicide. Solomon ruled the nation in Israel’s glory days, yet he couldn’t rule his own life. But all of this changed in the cross of Christ and the pouring out of the gift of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Now the dominant mark of a Spirit-filled person is measured not by a charismatic ministry, but by his personal character. Paul understood that the power of the cross had so conquered the forces of darkness that the decadence and opposition of the Roman world posed no threat to the godliness of Christians living in Ephesus. Godliness was not mediated by means of the government, but through the cross of Christ and his word. Character is not only possible in leaders, it is mandatory. If it is not present, it is not

because God has not blessed, but because there is something wrong with one's theology or his obedience.

The world holds that personal integrity and morality don't matter in leadership, but this text says that in the church, character is everything.

#### (b) The priority of a plurality of leadership

This emphasis on character over gift prevents the error of one man having too great an influence over his peers. At times, everyone likes to gather around a popular, charismatic leader, but there is a great danger that pride will bring down such an individual. The early church shared leadership among a plurality of brothers. It is much better to have many leaders with strong character and mediocre giftedness than to build a ministry around one man with an outstanding charisma, who later falls through pride and immorality. This also tells us that what the flock responds to most readily is not merely teaching, but teachers who care; not merely truth, but truth coupled with love.

Godliness, therefore, is protected by a plurality of leaders whose only authority lies in their unanimity.

#### (c) The priority of relationships over programs

Paul is far more concerned with how godly a church's leaders are than the number or quality of the programs they are running. The way to train godly leaders is to allow them to develop spiritually in their natural settings. Don't take them out of these settings in order to become involved in religious programs. Let them be normal husbands, fathers and workers.

In the late '70's and early '80's, one of our best elders was Lynn Berntson. Ten years ago, he wrote this to me from his home in Oregon:

The simple idea of individual relationships is in marked contrast to our culture. We are a group culture from crib to grave, from the nursery school of 25 babies, to classes, rock concerts, Sunday School, mass evangelism, and committees to make them all function. Last summer, I met rather primitive Africans who walked two hours each day with their sons, passing on their tribal beliefs, while their mothers ground corn, teaching their daughters. We are the more primitive culture, totally given to the spectator-sport, television (12,000 hours between the ages of 6 to 17, on average). The art of individual relationship is rare indeed, particularly when it comes to purposeful conversation, passing on essential truths that make the difference between real life and death. I sort of expect most things will continue this way—glass cathedrals, professional clergy, more buses, Sunday Schools, and many more conferences, personality-centered leadership, with great, staged million-dollar projects. I met a man just the other day raising that amount for some great American evangelical punch. My joy is getting old, feeding ducks with my grandson. I took him canoeing the other day. We had a great talk. He has 17 nouns and two verbs, but he does quite well.

Churches should have a minimum of programs that take folk out of their natural settings. Instead they should encourage men and women to be godly at home and at work. This is how we will produce a generation of godly leaders who are in such contrast to our political and business leaders that they will stand out for all to see and God will be glorified. When the church promotes godliness along those lines, it produces jewels in the midst of decadent cities and countries throughout the whole world.

I will close by reading a short essay written by Chuck Swindoll about an elder who modeled his life on this biblical model. Chuck had the privilege of having this man as a mentor. He writes,

There we sat, a cluster of six. A stubby orange candle burned at the center of our table. Flickering, eerie shadows crossed all our faces. One spoke; five listened. Every question was handled with such grace, such effortless ease. There was no doubt that each answer was drawn

from deep wells of wisdom, shaped by tough decisions and nurtured by time. Like forty years in the same church. And seasoned by travel. Like having ministered around the world. And honed by tests, risks, heartbreaks, and failures. But, like the best wines, it was those decades in the same crucible year after year that made his counsel invaluable. Had those years been spent in the military, he would have a chest full of medals.

His age? Seventy-two? His face? Rugged as fifty miles of bad road. His eyes? Ah, those eyes. Piercing. When he peered at you, it was as if they penetrated to the back of your cranium. He had virtually seen it all; weathered all the flack and delights of the flock. Outlasted all the fads and gimmicks of gullible and greedy generations. Known the ecstasy of seeing many lives revolutionized, the agony of several lives ruined, and the monotony of a few lives remaining unchanged. He has paid his dues. And he had the scars to prove it. A creative visionary!

But this is not to say he's over the hill. Or to suggest that he has lost his zest for living, his ability to articulate his thoughts, or his keen sense of humor. There we sat for well over three hours, hearing his stories, pondering his principles, questioning his conclusions, and responding to his ideas. The evening was punctuated with periodic outbursts of laughter, followed by protracted periods of quiet talk. All six lost contact with time...

Thirty years ago he was a model; last week I realized he had become a *mentor*. Thoroughly human and absolutely authentic, he has emerged a time-warped, well-worn vessel of honor fit for the Master's use. I found myself profoundly grateful that his shadow had crossed my life.

In a day of tarnished leaders, fallen heroes, busy fathers, frantic coaches, arrogant authority figures, and eggheaded profs, we need mentors like never before. Such rare finds are guides, not gods. They are approachable and caring souls who help us negotiate our way through life's labyrinth without shouting or dictating. Mentors know how to stretch us without insulting us, affirm us without flattering us, make us think without requiring their answers in return, release us without abandoning us. They're always right there, even though they may be a thousand miles away. They become invisible partners, whispering hope and reproofs on the journey toward excellence.

As we said goodbye, I walked a little slower. I thought about the things he had taught me without directly instructing me, and about the courage he had given me without deliberately exhorting me, and I wondered how it had happened. I wondered why I had been so privileged to have had my "face" reflected in his "water" or my "iron" sharpened by his "iron." A nostalgic knot formed in my throat as I forced myself to realize that, at age 72, he doesn't have much more than a couple of decades left, if that. I found myself wanting to run back to his car and tell him again how much I love and admire him. But it was late, and after all, I'm a 55-year-old man...

But as I stood there alone in the cold night air, I suddenly realized what I wanted to be most when I grow up.

Chuck Swindoll was writing about Ray Stedman, our first pastor at PBC. Through Ray Stedman's ministry, a generation of godly elders was raised up who operated under these principles laid down by the apostle Paul. May we in the second generation not deviate from this godly legacy. Amen.

1. Philip Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church, Volume II A.D. 100-325* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).

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1 Timothy 3:8-13

Sixth Message

Brian Morgan

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# CHOOSING LEADERS WHO SERVE

*SERIES: HOW TO RESTORE A CHURCH*

What do you think is the devil's most effective strategy in disrupting the work of the American church today? I would say it is distraction. Christians are so consumed with the tyranny of the urgent, as one writer has called it, that they neglect the best things. My friend, Todd Pickett, has a word for us on this matter. He wrote:

Urgency characterizes something whose value rises to supremacy for a brief span of time. Urgent matters must be taken care of immediately and for their moment of glory demand our full attention...Importance, on the other hand, abides in something that has consistent value unaffected by time. Probably the most compatible synonym would be "worth," whose root in classical Greek literally means "tipping the scales"—something that has weight... The problem arises when those things deemed "urgent" consistently preempt those things we recognize as "important." The danger is that we can become so bound to the urgent that we never are free to undertake the important...The horror of ignoring this issue is the inevitable realization that one has spent one's life doing what was urgent, but not what was important.

One of our former pastors, Dave Roper, agrees that this tyranny of the urgent is the plague of ministry. He wrote,

As I watch my friends in the ministry, I note an odd inconsistency: most of them ardently believe in what they're doing and yet many are utterly discouraged. They find themselves too busy and overburdened, and what may be worse, their busyness seems barren. As one of my friends once observed, nothing quite dispels the myth of ministry like being in it.

This is why I feel that Satan's most effective attack on the work of the ministry is this slow dissipation of the best by the good.

In our studies in the apostle Paul's letter to Timothy we come today to the order of leadership in the church, an order that was designed to solve the very problem we have highlighted. As we begin our study it will be helpful if we consult the book of Acts, specifically the incident in chapter 6 when it appears this problem first arose in the young church. So let's see what the apostles did about it.

## I. The origin of deacons (Acts 6:1-4)

Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." (NASB)

### (a) The problem: Dissension (6:1)

In the early church, a large number of widows did not have families to support them so they were placed under the financial care of the congregation. The apostles, who had been set aside for the spiri-

tual oversight of the body, added to their list of duties the important task of the distribution of a daily food allowance to these widows. But then a complaint arose over what appeared to be the neglect of one group. Now this complaint, whether it was well-founded or not, was really symptomatic of something much deeper: it brought to the surface a long-standing prejudice between Greek-speaking Jews (Hellenists) and Hebrew-speaking Jews.

This cleavage traced its roots all the way back to the days of Alexander the Great. The Greek warrior king swept through Asia Minor, Palestine and Egypt and brought to these conquered lands the Greek language and culture. This language (Koine Greek) became the common tongue of the people, and Greek philosophy the dominant thought. The progressive Jews in Alexandria saw this development as an opportunity for greater evangelism. In the Septuagint, they translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek (284-247 BC). They viewed this translation as a means for all nations to come to the light of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But not the traditionalists. They regarded this development as a threat to the purity of Judaism. They boycotted the new language, and cultivated instead the vernacular Aramaic, if not the Mishnaic Hebrew, the language of the rabbis (just as the Medieval scholars refused to use English and insisted on retaining Latin in the church services). The result of these responses by both the progressives and the traditionalists in Judaism was a linguistic cleavage among God's people, as Hebrew-speaking Jews felt a sense of superiority over the Hellenists. Thus when we view the complaint and murmuring in the book of Acts in this light, we can see how it perhaps had ignited already volatile feelings, and it had potential to split the body of Christ.

If a problem of like nature arose in the local church today, we would expect the leaders of the church—the elders, in other words—to handle the situation directly. But, as we will see, the apostles chose a different solution. Let's look again at what they did.

### (b) The real danger: Distraction (6:2, 4)

**And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."**

The apostles recognized that this dispute was a serious issue; this was why they summoned the whole congregation. But they discerned that behind this complaint lay a spiritual attack, a Satanic distraction to the work of the ministry. This is why they began their remarks by saying, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God to wait on tables." If they handled this crisis this way, if they sought to put out the fire directly, it wouldn't be long before another crisis came along vying for their attention. If all they did was put out fires, they would lose their first calling, which was "[devotion] to prayer and to the ministry of the word." They added prayer to preaching, knowing that without it (i.e. prayer for the ministry of the Spirit to water the word), it was unlikely that the word preached would bear fruit (John

Stott). What is all this telling us, therefore? It is that leaders must devote their full attention to their calling.

**(c) The solution: Delegation (6:3)**

Here is how the apostles solved the problem: “But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.” They delegated their authority.

**1. The theological basis**

All through the Scriptures, going back to the days of Moses, we see a clear theological basis for delegation. Moses had the gift of the Spirit and wisdom to judge the people of Israel, and no crisis or concern was too insignificant for him. But listen to what Jethro, his father-in-law, said to him on one occasion:

**(a) In the OT (Exodus 18:13-23)**

“Why do you alone sit as judge and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?...The thing that you are doing is not good. You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone...you teach...you select...then you will be able to endure.” These were wise words which Moses took to heart. Verse 25 says, “And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people.”

Next, we have an example from the life of Jesus.

**(b) The Example of Jesus (Mark 1:38)**

On this occasion, our Lord had come to Peter’s home town of Capernaum. After he had taught the people, cast out demons and healed Peter’s mother-in-law, they began bringing to him all who were ill and those who were demon possessed. But what was Jesus’ response to Peter next morning when Peter excitedly came to him with suggestions for more ministry among the people? Here is what Jesus said: “Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, in order that I may preach there also; for that is what I came out for” (Mark 1:38). Healing was secondary to Jesus’ calling of preaching, thus he refused to be distracted by what seemed to be an excellent opportunity to minister through healing.

We find other examples in Paul’s writings. In his letters to Timothy, he passes on an apostolic injunction.

**(c) Apostolic injunction of Paul to Timothy (1 Tim 4:4-16; 2 Tim 2:4; 4:2)**

“Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you...take pains with these things; be absorbed in them...pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching.” (1 Tim 4:14-16)

“No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier...Preach the word.” (2 Tim 2:4; 4:2)

**2. The formation of the office**

“select...seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task” (Acts 6:3). What was born out of necessity—to meet a need for the care and feeding of widows in Jerusalem—had become a regular church office by the time Paul wrote to Timothy in Ephesus.

We get the word deacon from this verb “to serve.” There are only two offices in the church: elders (who are set aside to devote themselves to preaching, teaching and discipling), and deacons (who are in charge of the caring ministries of the church). Thus the church grows in an atmosphere of order, specialization, and excellence.

And so, as we come now to our text from his letter to Timothy, his son in the faith, we have the context for Paul’s words.

**II. What are the qualifications for deacons? (Acts 6:3; 1 Tim 3:8-12)**

**“But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.” (Acts 6:3)**

**Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be husbands of one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. (1 Tim 3:8-12)**

**(1) Men Deacons**

**(a) Personal character: Above reproach**

Notice that the apostle begins his instructions about deacons with the word “likewise.” What he is saying is that his words concerning elders apply to deacons as well—they should be above reproach in their character. But why should men who are merely serving tables, caring for people who felt neglected, have to be “above reproach”? It is because every ministry in the church has as its goal not things, but people. People are the most important thing because they have been bought by the blood of Christ!

Paul highlights specific character traits in deacons that would be especially important and would stand out in stark contrast to the depravity of the Greek culture in Ephesus, a society dominated by greed and sensuality.

“Dignified” is the first quality mentioned. Deacons should have a sense of the majesty and honor that comes when one is associated with God. They should walk in a way that brings weight and honor to what they do. About such a person the Greeks said, “thus did he throw a cloak of majesty about himself.” If a deacon is uncontrolled in speech and actions and is regarded as being foolish, he is not given weight or respect.

“Not double tongued” is the second characteristic Paul mentions. This is an excellent translation. It is easy to fall into this sin when one is settling disputes and controversies. A deacon must not be insincere, saying one thing to the offended party and another to the accused. He must be consistent in his speech.

A deacon must not be “addicted to much wine.” He is free to drink, but free of alcohol’s claim on him. Thus he is free from the abusive evils that come from drunkenness.

He is “not fond of sordid gain.” He will not take an honorable thing and debase it in order to make money. This is what the greedy merchants of Ephesus did: they debased religion and sexuality in order to make money. The temple priestesses were used by merchants to make money through uttering nonsensical oracles to the tourists who came from all over the world to visit Ephesus. If there is one ounce of that in you, crucify it! Never minister for money. If money is given you, it must come from people who have appreciated your ministry and they want to set you aside to minister to others. Don’t serve the tables of widows and orphans with impure motives and unclean hands. If you want to start a ministry, start it with your own funds. Then, if it is a legitimate ministry, God will supply your needs through prayer, and those who are blessed by your ministry will support it. True ministry does not require money-raising campaigns and marketing techniques to get it off the ground.

If we need encouragement in this area, we only have to read the biographies of the great deacons of the past. Take George Mueller, for instance, who cared for orphaned children in England back in the 1800's. This man trusted in prayer alone to provide for his needs and the needs of his children. I will read from his diary, dated December 16, 1842:

December 16, 1842. Nothing has come in. Three shillings five-pence, which one of the laborers was able to give, was all we had. At six o'clock this evening, our need being now very great, not only with reference to the Orphan Houses, but also the day schools, etc., I gave myself, with two of the laborers, to prayer. There needed some money to come in before 8:00 a.m. tomorrow morning, as there was none to take in milk for breakfast, to say nothing about the many other demands of tomorrow, being Saturday. Our hearts were at peace, while asking the Lord, and assured that our Father would supply our need. We had scarcely risen from our knees when I received a letter, containing a sovereign for the orphans, half of which was from a young East India officer, and the other half from the produce of the sale of a piece of work which the sister who sent the money had made for the benefit of the orphans. She wrote, "I love to send these little gifts. They so often come in season." Truly, thus it was this time. About five minutes later I received from a brother the promise of fifty pounds for the orphans, to be given during the next week; and a quarter of an hour after that, about seven o'clock, a brother gave me a sovereign, which an Irish sister in the Lord has left this day, on her departure for Dublin, for the benefit of the orphans. How sweet and precious to see thus so manifestly the willingness of the Lord to answer the prayers of his needy children!

By 1875, George Mueller had lodged, fed and educated more than 2,000 children. He refused to take a salary for himself, but trusted in prayer alone to provide for his needs and the needs of his orphans.

Next, says Paul, deacons must be seen "holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience." Though the primary function of deacons is not teaching, they must be skilled in matters of the Christian faith. Thus it is required that they have a clear understanding of Christian doctrine. And the things they believe, they act upon. A guilty conscience has paralyzing effect and renders one ineffective for service.

Thus we have the apostle's word to men deacons.

Now Paul turns to women, either wives of deacons and elders or women deacons.

## (2) Women Deacons

**Women [or wives] must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. (1 Tim 3:11)**

Some scholars have wondered if Paul is referring here to the wives of elders and deacons, or to women deacons. A glance at other passages, however, reveals that women served as leaders and deacons in the church. Phoebe, for instance, was a deacon in the church at Cenchrea. Paul wrote in Romans: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a *servant* (deacon) of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper (patroness) of many, and of myself as well" (Rom 16:1).

Phoebe was a servant (deacon) of Cenchrea, one of the two seaports of Corinth (Acts 18:18). Apparently she had proved herself well there as a "patroness" who gave aid from her own support to Paul and to the church. She was selected to represent the church in an official way as the bearer of the letter to the Romans. What an honor!

Paul exhorts the Christians in Rome to be generous in supplying her needs, and to welcome her into their intimate circles of fellowship.

Thus it is evident that women in NT times did serve as deacons. This being the case, they too, like men, must be "dignified." This is the same word Paul used concerning men. They are to live so close to God that there is worth and glory in their lives.

They are not to be "malicious gossips." They must not be slanderers. This was the Greek translation in the LXX of the word for Satan, who tries to destroy Christians by lying and bombarding them with fierce accusations. This tactic creeps into Christian circles at times under the guise of caring when people share prayer requests. Rather than being truly concerned, some are more delighted by the fact that they are aware of a tasty morsel of gossip about someone. Proverbs 18:8 says,

**The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels,  
And they go down into the chambers of the belly.**

But, like Judas, the moment one eats that morsel (John 13:27), he or she becomes the instrument of the devil. Again, quoting from Proverbs,

**A worthless man digs up evil,  
While his words are as a scorching fire.  
A perverse man spreads strife,  
And a slanderer separates intimate friends. (Prov 16:27-28)**

When we give into the temptation to use information against someone, we end up being the "worthless man." Notice the escalation here. First, we "dig up evil"; then our words become a "scorching fire"; we "spread strife"; and the result of our words is to "separate intimate friends." Intimacy that has taken years to create is destroyed by the words of a slanderer. Leaders have a greater potential to become instruments of the devil because they learn much about people that is shared in confidence. Thus it is required of deacons that they not be slanderers.

And they must be "temperate." This word was used originally to refer to the use of alcohol. But here I think it is a reference to being clear in one's thinking—to be clearheaded, and thus free from distraction or cloudy thinking. A woman deacon is to be well founded on the truth of Scripture. This makes her alert and stable, enabling her to maintain a vigilant watch over the flock, because she is keenly aware of Satan's presence and malevolence.

Finally, she must be "faithful in all things." If she starts a project, she completes it. She isn't prone to taking on too much. She has learned to focus, so there are no loose ends when she is given oversight. She is loyal to people and to the task at hand.

So we have Paul's word on the character qualities of leaders of ministries. Whether they are men or women, they must be persons of impeccable, godly character.

Secondly, like elders, deacons need experience.

## (b) Experience (3:10, 12)

**And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach... Let deacons be husbands of one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households.**

The word for "tested" was used of pottery in the first century. A pot was tested in the fire before it was put to use. If it came through without cracking, it was labeled underneath "Approved." What is true of pots should be true of leaders. Test leaders before they are put to work in the ministry. Test them in their homes and in their communities, etc. Is the prospective deacon a good husband, a one-woman kind of man, a good manager of his children and household? In the Greek, this word "manage" refers not only how well you rule,

but how well you care for someone and engage yourself with their concerns. The best managers of companies do this, and so must the managers in the church. Are they concerned about their children's concerns or do they lord it over them?

**(c) No mention of giftedness, only character**

Unlike elders, there is no mention here of speaking gifts, or indeed any gifts. With leaders, character is more important than giftedness; with deacons, no specific spiritual gift is required.

Deacons therefore are pure of character, and they are proven out in the normal course of life, in marriage and in the home.

Next, Paul goes on to refer to the value of the office of deacon.

### III. The value of the office (3:13)

**For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.**

**(a) A high standing**

The work of a deacon is no menial task, no small honor. Our own Ethel Smith occupies a high place of honor in our congregation. For years, she has single-mindedly concerned herself with refugees from Eastern Europe and has helped resettle scores of people here in this area.

**(b) Much confidence**

People who take on a ministry of caring for those whom the world despises face tremendous opposition. Ask Connie David and the women who venture out with love and grace into the dangerous, hostile world of those who denigrate the work of the local Crisis Pregnancy Center. God grants these women courage to overcome fear when they go into high school classrooms to speak and to elevate sexual purity. They have joy in leading women to Christ in the midst of opposition from picketing, hostile TV cameras, and infiltrating spies. Through it all, they gain "great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus."

Thus we have the origin of the office of deacon, and the qualifications and value of the office.

Now we will go on to see the results that this kind of specialization brought to the early church.

### IV. The results of specialization (Acts 6:5-7)

**And the statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God kept spreading; and the number of disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many priests were becoming obedient to the faith.**

**(a) A freedom for all to minister**

We learn from this text that it is Satan's strategy to keep all the ministries of a church under the control of a few leaders. This in turn leads to mediocrity in teaching, boredom for the saints, and burnout for the leaders. Pastors are not to oversee everything and seek to impose solutions to all problems. What this text demonstrates is that the ministry prospers when people are set free to serve. The main job of

pastors and teachers is teaching and sowing principles in the hearts of their flock.

Notice what Acts 6:3 says. As the apostles allowed other godly men and women to lead, these people were "put in charge." The apostles were not even on the committee! They didn't have to be, because other godly men knew what to do in the situation under review. This is exactly what has happened in a new ministry among us where a group of godly men are meeting together to pray for and gather names of people who are unemployed. And they are going even further. They are establishing a network of potential job openings, writing resumes, etc., to help people who are looking for jobs. The key thing here is that leaders must be willing to live with the tension of neglect in order for these ministries to develop. I am concerned that there are many areas of seeming neglect in the church. This weighs on me and on the other leaders. But if we were to become involved in leading in all of these areas, things would not be done well and we would end up neglecting what we are actually called to do.

Thus we see here that there is a freedom for all to minister.

**(b) Freedom for all to excel**

Because the apostles devoted themselves to prayer and to the study of the Scriptures, there was excellence in the teaching. They were free from distraction. And there was excellence in the care of widows. Deacons could devote their full energies to it and thus did a better job than the apostles would have devoting only half their energies to it. Notice that all those chosen to accomplish the task of caring for the widows had Greek names. In order to overcome feelings of neglect on the part of the Greek widows, the apostles stacked the committee with Greek-speaking Jews.

**(c) Resulting in unity and love**

And the whole thing "found approval." Love was the result of freedom, order and excellence. This was in keeping with Paul's word in Eph 4:16: "the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

**(d) Resulting in evangelism**

"And the word of God kept spreading." This delegating of responsibility allowed the apostles to continue to focus on prayer and on the word, to continue to equip and evangelize, resulting in converts and godly disciples.

And the word was spread, not only by the apostles but by the deacons themselves. Philip became Philip the evangelist, and he led the first African convert to Christ. Stephen, the first martyr, preached a sermon that the apostle Paul heard. And what he heard he could not forget. Later, Paul had his Damascus Road experience. How important is the work of deacons? Had the apostles not said no to this work Stephen would not have been equipped, he would never have made that speech, and Paul would not have found Christ.

I have to say that I myself am a pastor today because another pastor said no to ministry. When I was 19, I asked David Roper, our college pastor, to minister in my fraternity in college. He refused, but offered instead to teach me so that I could lead a Bible study in my dorm. Christians are free to say no so that they may become free to excel. Do not be tyrannized by the urgent, but give yourselves instead to the important things, the best things.



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1 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Seventh Message

Brian Morgan

April 12, 1992

# THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS

*SERIES: HOW TO RESTORE A CHURCH*

In a *Time* essay entitled “The Year 2000, is it the end—or just the beginning?” Henry Grunwald wrote recently:

100 years ago, the French painter Andre Derain, contemplating the moral climate at the end of his century, complained that ‘we are the mushrooms on ancient dunghills.’ So here we are, an incredible, terrible, marvelous century later, nearing our own fin de siecle and fin de millennium. How do we measure up in comparison? We are beset by a whole range of discontents and confusions. For a great many, the dunghill has become a natural habitat. Derain and other observers of the depravity would, in fact, be stunned by the chaos of manners and speech, by the hellish ubiquity of crime and the easy—one might almost say democratic—availability of drugs; by the new varieties of decadence—rock songs about rape and suicide, pornography at the corner newsstand, commercials for S&M clubs on your friendly cable channel, not to mention telephone sex.

When we read things like this, we have to ask ourselves, How do we promote godliness in a world seemingly gone mad? And, secondly, how should we conduct ourselves in the household of God? This is the theme of our message this morning from Paul’s first letter to Timothy. We remember what the apostle wrote in the opening verses of our text: “I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, [I write] so that that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God” (1 Tim 3:14-15). From the background material which we have already studied we know that the moral climate of Ephesus, and indeed the whole Roman Empire, was far more decadent than our own age. Thus in this letter Paul advises Timothy how as a pastor he could promote godliness in that wicked first century environment.

Before we look at what we could describe as Paul’s radical formula for godliness in the household of God, I will give the background to four different Jewish approaches to godliness that were practiced at the time of Jesus. I share these because it appears that many Christians today are resorting to one or more of these methods rather than attending to the inspired word of the apostle concerning godliness.

First, the Pharisees. Their approach to godliness in an immoral world was through the intensification of Torah—through law-keeping, in other words. They defined righteousness down to the minutest detail, leaving no questions unanswered as to what was righteous behavior and what was not. This approach was beneficial in that it gave one a sense of security. In a system where everything is rigidly defined, inner tensions are few. The problem with this, of course, is that everything is dealt with in an external fashion and nothing touches the heart.

Second, the Sadducees. These were the priestly class in Israel, the wealthy landowners. They did not believe in the resurrection or the supernatural. They were believers in the here and now, thus they enjoyed their wealth, prestige, and power. This, of course, is the way of compromise; it removes the tension of always having to go against the grain. True godliness is always counter-culture, but the Saddu-

cees’ philosophy could be summed up in the phrase, “If you can’t beat them, join them.”

Third, the Essenes. They felt the world was so decadent it was impossible to maintain godliness, thus their approach was to flee to the desert in an effort to get away from evil. They took Isaiah 40:2 literally: “go prepare a way in the wilderness.” In the desert they founded a new community based on rigid asceticism. This, they felt, would be the basis for the new covenant, which would culminate in a great deliverance at the end of the age for their godly remnant. In fact, one of the Qumran documents has the following quotation,

“For in a little while, I know  
Thou wilt raise up survivors among Thy people  
And a remnant within Thine inheritance.” (1QH 6.7)

The benefit to this approach of the Essenes was that it put shoe leather, as it were, to their zeal. They simply put on their shoes and left for the desert, leaving behind the tensions inherent in trying to survive in an ungodly age. The problem with this approach was that it fostered self-righteousness. Furthermore, when the King arrived, the Essenes were still out in the desert. They missed the inauguration of the kingdom.

Fourth, the Zealots. They felt the existing powers were so decadent and oppressive, they decided to overthrow the government themselves. Their philosophy was, the end justifies the means. But this approach is very dangerous to the soul. If we insist on using the tactics of the enemy there is a great danger that we will become like him. Further, this approach removes the tension of having to wait for God’s vindication. This is what happens when we seek to take control of our own destiny.

Now in the New Testament we learn that none of these approaches to godliness that I have just outlined—legalism, compromise, escape, or coercion—promotes true godliness. There is another, radically different way, taught by Jesus and his apostles, which Paul now goes on to deal with in this section of his letter to Timothy.

The apostle begins by describing what the church is.

## I. Making known the high calling of the church (3:14-15)

**I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, [I write] so that that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (NASB)**

You can never be godly until you first learn who you are. Godliness thus begins with identity. First, says the apostle,

### (a) In relation to God

Christians have the privilege of being the holy congregation where the God personally dwells. The Greek word used for church here means, those who are called out to have a relationship with God. This word in turn is translated from the Hebrew word for congregation—the congregation of the Holy God—which is used all through the

OT. The church, therefore, is not a static, dead letter organization, but a living organism where the holy God dwells. If we are Christians, this is who we are; in this we find our identity.

The first time this expression “house of God” was used in the OT was when the patriarch Jacob had a dream in which he saw a ladder coming down from heaven, with the angels ascending and descending upon it. In that glorious scene, God descended from heaven and spoke to him, passing on the covenant he had made with Abraham concerning a land and a seed. Jacob awoke, filled with a sense of awe, and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.’ And he was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven!’” (Gen 28:16-17).

Godliness thus begins not by doing but by seeing. The holy God condescends to dwell in our midst! This should strike us, as it did Jacob, with a sense of awe and fear. All other attempts at godliness begin from the wrong starting point: they work from earth up to heaven, rather than viewing heaven as descending to earth.

And second,

**(b) In relation to the world**

The church, says Paul, is “the pillar and support of the truth” (3:15). Ephesus was the site of the Temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. One hundred and seventeen 60-foot tall columns supported the massive roof of this structure which was 420 feet long by 240 feet wide. Yet for all that impressive display, the Holy One was not to be found in that place, for there was no truth there. Nothing that went on in that temple could bring support or stability to one’s life. On the other hand, when the church in Ephesus met in the homes of Christians, God himself came among the congregation, imparting truth and stability to the members.

In the OT, God descended in a pillar of cloud and fire to lead his people (Exod 13:21; 14:24). This was what gave the Israelites stability in the wilderness. Solomon’s temple had two large, 27-foot tall pillars erected in front, one called Jachin (“He shall establish”), and the other Boaz (“in it is strength”) (1 Kgs 7:21). Now in Christ, the true heavenly temple is being built, which is his church. If we build on him, our lives will outlast history itself, says the book of Revelation: “I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God” (in the New Jerusalem) (Rev 3:12). The magnificent Temple of Artemis, with its huge columns, is no longer there, but the church of God is still standing, having been erected on the sure foundation of the rock of Christ.

In summary, we find that it is useless to try and motivate people by hurling holy exhortations at them. Tell them who they are. That is the best method. Tell them that God has descended to dwell among his people, and that he has given Christians the marvelous responsibility of being his light to illuminate the world. This is what gives Christians a tremendous sense of dignity and a proper motivation for ethical behavior.

We have a very good example of this in the OT incident when David sent his men to Nabal to ask for provisions. Far from being generous with his possessions, Nabal instead humiliated David’s troops and sent them back half-naked. David was furious, and he vowed to slaughter the man. Abigail was caught in the middle. How could she motivate David to righteous behavior so that he would put off his anger and forgive her father Nabal? There is a wonderful lesson for all of us in her approach. Here is what she said when she met David: “Please forgive the transgression of your maidservant; for the Lord will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord, and evil shall not be found in you all your days. And should anyone rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, then the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the

living with the Lord your God; but the lives of your enemies He will sling out as from the hollow of a sling. And it shall come about when the Lord shall do for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and shall appoint you ruler over Israel, that this will not cause grief or a troubled heart to my lord, both by having shed blood without cause and by my lord having avenged himself” (1 Sam 25:28-31).

Abigail reminded David that he was the Messianic King, that he would be the head of state. His occupation was to do holy things, as when he killed Goliath, the enemy of Israel, with a slingshot. She reminded him that in the face of his enemies, the Lord would take care of him. David would not want on his record the fact that as king he had shed someone’s blood in anger. Thus Abigail defused the anger of David. She did not berate him with holy exhortations, rather she reminded him of who he was, then from that basis, she spoke about ethics.

This is what we must emphasize. Know who you are. God lives in Christians. They are the light of the world. What a privilege, to be ambassadors for Christ!

The first step in godliness therefore is for Christians to discover their true identity.

We find the second step in 3:16, which is the center of our text today:

## II. Making known the majesty of Christ (3:16)

**And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness:**

**He who was revealed in the flesh,  
Was vindicated in the Spirit,  
Beheld by angels,  
Proclaimed among the nations,  
Believed on in the world,  
Taken up in glory.**

**(a) Godliness begins by seeing, not doing**

The mystery of godliness is not revealed by teaching morals, but by glorying in the Person of Jesus Christ. Our focus must be on Jesus and his story. Being captured by Christ is the first step to godliness. Spirituality, therefore, precedes morality.

Do you remember the NT story of Jesus’ encounter with Nathanael? Nathaniel was sitting under a fig tree, reading Genesis 28, the account of Jacob’s vision, when Jesus approached him. This man was wondering how could Jacob, a man of guile, be a patriarch of Israel. On seeing Nathanael, Jesus said, “Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is no guile.” Nathanael was amazed, and he believed. Now hear what Jesus said to him, “Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these.’ And He said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (John 1:50-51). The key to godliness, Jesus was saying, was seeing, not doing. In the new order, Jacob’s vision would be the experience of every Christian. We all will glory in the majesty of Christ, our gateway to heaven. This is how we become godly.

Then, once we have seen Christ as he truly is, our seeing leads to the next step.

**(b) Being captivated by his person**

We are drawn by the glory of Christ. And there is a sense of awe in the way this happens.

There are three things to note in this beautiful little hymn. Notice, first, that all the verbs are in the passive voice: manifested, justified, beheld, preached, believed, taken up. For Jesus, the mystery of god-

liness began in a passive mode. He was submissive to his heavenly Father because he trusted him. So the key to godliness is to trust the sovereign God.

As we look closely at this hymn we see that it is a story told in antiphony. It is as if there are two choirs, one on earth, the other in heaven. The first line is sung from the perspective of earth: “He was manifest in the flesh”; the second line is sung from a heavenly viewpoint: “Justified in the spirit,” and so on. There is an echo between earth and heaven: earth in weakness, heaven, heaven (angels) earth, earth and heaven. This story is incredibly large in scope: it includes all the nations. It is much larger than the human race: it includes the angels. And it is much larger than earth: it includes heaven. Knowing this should expand the Christian’s vision of the scope of this stage upon which Christ is presented. The fact that godliness has such an incredibly large stage, one of international and universal dimensions, should force us to our knees in worship.

Third, notice that this hymn is a story told from weakness to glory; and it is told twice. It begins in the weakness of Jesus’ flesh: the incarnation was anything but a display of earthly grandeur. His vindication was pure spirit. And the greatest act of that vindication was the resurrection. Then, the angels watched at his ascension and they beheld that glory.

But God tells the story again, this time in the gospels: It is preached among the nations. And how was it proclaimed? In the weakness of the cross, a “stumbling block to Jew, and foolishness to Greeks.” Yet, amazingly, it is believed by the nations who willingly bow down before this ascended Christ who was taken up in glory.

The way to destroy sensual appetites, therefore, is not only to crucify them, but to replace them with heavenly appetites that transcend the earthly. Sensual appetites are limited in their scope. Once you begin to indulge them, your appetite increases but your pleasure decreases until there is no feeling left in the soul. But it is not so with the heavenly appetites. Once you begin to indulge them you start to feel things you never experienced before. You feel a wider range and breadth of worship, transcending your former earthly pleasures. And the capacity of these heavenly appetites keeps increasing with the eternal pleasures of sweetness.

So godliness begins by first seeing Christ. Then we are captivated by him and drawn into his marvelous light and love.

Third, we rejoice in song because we are united with him. “Christ in you, the hope of glory,” wrote the apostle in Colossians. Here, Paul breaks into a song of praise about Christ.

#### (c) Being united with Christ: Rejoicing

The apostle breaks into song because God’s story is not only the story of Jesus, it is the story of every individual believer: “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” The way to be godly is by seeing the glory of Christ. Then, with an unveiled face, as we see that glory we become transformed from glory to glory. We don’t know how or when this happens, but we are changed—by seeing, not by doing, as the apostle says in 2 Corinthians: “But we all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). Thus the more you become captivated by Christ, the more his story becomes your story. Then you begin to glory in your weakness and you desire no earthly vindication for your life. You put off fleshly grandeur and learn to trust the Spirit for vindication. You see your life as being “beheld by angels.” Then you take that gospel of weakness into the world and proclaim it, and you are awed as people enter and bow down to the risen Christ. This is not learned by formula at a conference where you are told to “do this and live.” It will not work.

Godliness is not a formula; it is something that happens to you as you are captivated with this Person.

A good illustration here is the story of the two disciples who were walking on the road to Emmaus. Their faces were sad, their hearts downcast, following the crucifixion of their Master. Then Jesus began walking with them, but they did not recognize him. He asked them what they were discussing. When they told him that they had hoped the Messiah would redeem Israel, but now their hopes had been destroyed in the crucifixion, Jesus told them that their minds were dull. Then, beginning with Moses and the prophets, he opened up to them the Scriptures, explaining to them, not about Israel, but about himself. In his resurrection was the beginning of the vindication of Israel. The transcendent new kingdom, the heavenly temple was standing right in front of them, but they were blind and dull and they could not discern it. Then, it says, their hearts “burned.” Jesus fed them a meal. Perhaps as he fed them they saw the scars in his hands, and their eyes were opened to behold him. This is how they became godly—they saw Jesus, and, as we have said, this is true godliness.

Christians, therefore, make known the high calling of the church. And second, believers set forth and focus upon the majesty of Christ. I urge you to read the gospels at times just for their own sake. Focus upon Christ and who he is—when he heals, when he prays, when he preaches—and you will become like him.

The third element that intensifies our godliness is a rather painful one. At times we will have to face apostasy, even in the midst of intimate circles.

### III. By being undaunted by apostasy (4:1-5)

**But the Spirit explicitly says that in latter times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, who forbid marriage [and advocate] abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully received by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.**

Here Paul tells Timothy that there is another element—evil—that Christians have to deal with. He goes on to detail four things about apostasy in the church.

#### (a) Know it is predicted

**But the Spirit explicitly says that in latter times some will fall away from the faith...**

“Latter times” does not mean the two weeks before Jesus returns. This is referring to the entire age between Pentecost and the Second Coming of Christ. But don’t be surprised by this, says Paul. Some will “fall away from the faith.” In these latter times, God is calling out a people for his own name. In that process, believers can’t escape the tension of living with evil, not only in the world, but even in the church. The approach which the Essenes took won’t work here. There is no escaping the evil of the world. Don’t try to run away and start a pure church. Rather, live with that tension, not only in an ungodly world, but within the very ranks of leadership in a church or home. Know therefore that evil is predicted.

And secondly, know its source.

#### (b) Know the source: Not men, but devils

**...some will fall away, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons...**

I do not fully understand this mystery but, according to this, in order to become godly we must come face to face with the devil's influence upon someone we love. John 6, the story of the feeding of the five thousand, is a tale of apostasy. The multitudes returned next day, not for Jesus' teaching, but because they wanted more bread. When there was none offered, they left. The next scene takes place in the synagogue. The field narrows now; just the disciples are present. When Jesus tells them clearly who he is, and the implications of that, the text says, "many of the disciples went back to the things they had left behind." The apostasy goes further. In the next scene, Jesus tells the disciples, "Even one of you will betray me." Later, in the Garden, the apostles witness the betrayal of Jesus to the Romans through the kiss of the devil himself who had inhabited Judas, one of the disciples. Jesus was kissed by the devil!

When betrayal and apostasy occur, God is intensifying your love for godliness. Peter would later say to Jesus, following all the apostasy I have described, "I can't leave you; you have the words of eternal life." We have seen that the more intense the evil and persecution of the church in Eastern Europe, the purer the church became. Even in our own church I have seen situations where a spouse committed apostasy, and the result was that what was once a lukewarm family in the faith became purified and intense in its godliness as a result. It is true that those closest to us can have the greatest potential for wounding us, since our love for them is so great. When that happens, it is not a sign that life is out of control; this is part of God's plan to make us godly. Apostasy, therefore, intensifies our godly affections.

Thirdly, Paul writes about the devil's methods.

#### (c) Know their methods

**...by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, who forbid marriage [and advocate] abstaining from foods...**

To initiate apostasy, the devil uses men and women who have indulged sin so habitually they have silenced their once healthy conscience; it has been "seared as with a branding iron." To cover their sin and the deadness of their souls, they resort to hypocrisy, even teaching about it. Calvin wrote, "Bad consciences that are branded by the hot iron of their evil deeds always resort to hypocrisy as an easy refuge, that is, they contrive hypocritical pretences to deceive the eyes of God." All they have left to deal with are the externals. Concerning hypocrisy, John Fletcher wrote, "A hypocrite hides wickedness under a cloak of goodness: clouds without rain, wells without water, trees without fruit, the ape of piety, the mask of sin, glorious without and carrion within. They do not put off evil but throw a cloak over it. The hypocrite spins his virtues from himself, spiderlike...The Christian has his virtues from above. The one is like marshy ground, the other is watered from heaven."

Now notice the doctrines of demons. What do they teach? Well, the hypocrite can teach but one thing: he specializes in externals; this is where he intensifies religion. For instance, he forbids marriage, he advocates abstaining from foods, etc. He appears overly zealous about these matters, beating the flesh into submission as a sign of purity. But these things don't even touch the spirit. They are of no value against fleshly indulgence. The Pharisees were scrupulous about fasting and tithing, but in their anger and hypocrisy they plotted the murder of Jesus. Legalistic people, though they seem zealous and godly, can be the most cruel and angry of all people. If someone comes on overly zealous about externals, you have to ask yourself, is there evil within? Are they covering up something?

Don't be taken in by these strange doctrines, says Paul. There is an antidote.

#### (d) Know the antidote: Balance

**For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.**

Don't be taken in. Be balanced. The Christian is to have the same approach to the creation as God. When God made the fruit of the land, he pronounced it good. Marriage is good. Sexuality is good. Food is good. The mark of the Christian is freedom, appreciation, and joy, not gloom and doom. Christians more than anyone else should be able to enjoy life. Unlike the non-Christian, we know how to enjoy the creation. We have the Word of God and prayer, and these two things sanctify all of life. Scripture tells us how to set a marriage to their proper use, sexuality to its proper use, and drink and food to its proper use. Let us avoid self-indulgence, but let us share great joy and appreciation as we live in the created order. And when we live like this, non-Christians find it very attractive. They will come, asking questions, because they have seen true godliness, not externals or hypocrisy, being demonstrated by God's grace, through God's people, his church.

Though it is painful, coming face to face with apostasy is part of the process of becoming godly and cultivating spiritual affections. But, if we remember that apostasy is predicted, and if we recognize the methods of the evil one, we shall not be thwarted by it.

I will close by reading how an unknown, second century author described Christians who had taken Paul's word seriously:

The Christians are not distinguished from other men by country, by language, nor by civil institutions. For they neither dwell in cities by themselves, nor use a peculiar tongue, nor lead a singular mode of life. They dwell in the Grecian or barbarian cities, as the case may be; they follow the usage of the country in dress, food, and other affairs of life. Yet they present a wonderful and confessedly paradoxical conduct. They dwell in their own native lands, but as strangers. They take part in all things, as citizens; and they suffer all things, as foreigners. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every native land is a foreign. They marry, like all others; they have children; but they do not cast away their offspring. They have the table in common, but not wives. They are in the flesh, but do not live after the flesh. They live upon the earth, but are citizens of heaven. They obey the existing laws, and excel the laws by their lives. They love all, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown, and yet they are condemned. They are killed and are made alive. They are poor and make many rich. They lack all things, and in all things abound. They are reproached, and glory in their reproaches. They are cursed, and they bless. They receive scorn, and they give honor. When punished, they rejoice, as being made alive. By the Jews they are attacked as aliens, and by the Greeks persecuted; and the cause of the enmity their enemies cannot tell...This lot God has assigned to the Christians in the world; and it cannot be taken from them.

May that be our legacy, too; not that of the Pharisee, the Sadducee, the Essene, or the Zealot, but that of the true Christian. Amen.

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1 Timothy 4:6-16

Eighth Message

Brian Morgan

July 5, 1992

# THE LOST SECRET TO SPIRITUAL VITALITY

*SERIES: HOW TO RESTORE A CHURCH*

On February 11, 1986 the nation of Israel waited in breathless anticipation for the arrival of a hero from the Soviet Union. His name was Natan Sharansky, a dissident who worked for the Aliyah, the movement that was pressuring the Soviet government to allow Russian Jews to emigrate to Israel. Sharansky had quite openly denounced to the foreign press the KGB's persecution of Soviet Jews. In 1973 he had applied for an exit visa. He renounced his Soviet citizenship and expressed his desire to emigrate to Israel. Two years later he married Avital, and the day after the wedding he was taken into custody by the KGB. He was tried for treason, and sentenced to 13 years in the Gulag. While he was in prison, his wife, who had emigrated to Israel, worked desperately for his release. Even President Reagan became involved. Now, after 11 agonizing years, he was free at last, and all Israel was waiting to welcome home one her sons.

His release was kept secret even to Sharansky himself. He writes about it in his book *Fear No Evil*:

I was taken to the airport and put in the aeroplane, accompanied by four KGB men. And our direction was West, judging from the sun. That's why I presumed that something especially pleasant was going on. I was very excited. Then, when about two hours passed and it seemed it can't be the Urals, it must be the border of the Soviet Union, I started demanding from them to explain. Finally one of the KGB men came and said he was authorized to tell me the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union has deprived me of the Soviet citizenship due to my very bad behavior, undermining the honor of being a Soviet citizen. Then I answered. I said that first of all, I am deeply satisfied that 13 years after I asked to deprive me of the Soviet citizenship, my demand is already met.

Sharansky had not only had survived his imprisonment, he had emerged victorious over the KGB. This man had no political clout. He had been subjected to endless days of brutal interrogation, solitary confinement, sickness and starvation, yet he emerged victorious and free. During his imprisonment—in fact, on the 45th day of a hunger strike he had embarked upon—the Soviet leader Brezhnev died. It was his heart, not Sharansky's, that had failed to hold up. Shortly afterwards, Brezhnev's successor Andropov died. Four years after Sharansky's release, the whole Soviet state and the dreaded KGB collapsed. Meanwhile this Jewish dissident and prisoner of conscience was enjoying his new-found freedom with his wife in Jerusalem.

How did this man survive years of brutality and deprivation in prison? What was his secret? It lay in something he took with him to the Gulag. Just before he was arrested by the KGB, his wife gave him a copy of the Hebrew Book of Psalms. This was all he had to take with him, but it was all he needed to survive the dark and evil days of his confinement. Quoting again from his book,

In a totalitarian regime, it is essential for an individual to understand his own history and to be connected with his own values. That is why the turning toward history and toward our national roots among my own people became such a liberating process for me and many of my friends. A spiritually liberated person, standing on the firm ground of moral principle, and understanding what he is fight-

ing for, has an inexhaustible reserve of strength to resist totalitarianism. And therein lies the essence of the our struggle.

This will be our theme today as we resume our studies in the apostle Paul's first letter to Timothy. Paul, you remember, was writing to his young son in the faith in Ephesus, instructing him on how to restore a church when all the forces around, like a looming KGB, were bent on destroying his work.

Timothy, as leader of this small band of Christians, was about as much in the minority in Ephesus as Natan Sharansky was in the Soviet Union. The economy of Ephesus was based on the licentious cult of Artemis. The temple that dominated the skyline of the city had become the seventh wonder of the ancient world. Tourists from all over the known world poured into Ephesus, making it the leading banking center in Asia Minor. Thus the temple brought together the destructive and intimidating forces of idolatry, sexual licentiousness, and materialism.

It is no less intimidating living here in the San Francisco Bay Area! Our fast-paced computer world attracts technical wizards from all over the globe. Just to the north lies San Francisco, the leading financial and tourist center of this region. It is also the symbol of sexual licentiousness. The recent gay and lesbian parade in that city was attended by almost half a million people. How can a little church like PBC/Cupertino have an influence for godliness in this intimidating world that seems bent on our destruction? Paul will answer this question (the same question that was perplexing Timothy in Ephesus) in the text to which we come this morning from chapter 4 of his letter.

At first glance, Paul's answer seems rather simple. Don't worry about your influence, says the apostle; just focus on your own spiritual health.

Let's begin reading from verse 6 of chapter 4.

## I. Focus on your own spiritual health (4:6-12)

**In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being [constantly] nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. But discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and [also] for the [life] to come. It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. (NASB)**

### (a) With the right attitude (4:6)

Timothy is pastor to the church at Ephesus, and Paul's first word to him is that he should focus on his own spiritual health in the midst of that decadent place. Have a proper attitude, counsels the apostle. Timothy should not assume that his office will automatically feed his spiritual life or give him spiritual authority. People often make the mistake of thinking that if they could only enter into the ministry on a fulltime basis, then they would automatically become spiritually mature. But it

doesn't work that way. Becoming a spiritual man or woman demands the qualities that Paul sets out in these verses.

Here is the first.

**(b) With the right diet**

**...being [constantly] nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. (4:6b-7)**

Timothy must watch his diet: he must cut out the fat. I had a physical examination recently, and my doctor told me that my cholesterol level is too high. Years of eating ice cream and pouring cream in my coffee have caught up with me, so now I have to cut back on these things. It is my observation that as Christians, our spiritual arteries are clogged with Christian junk food that has dulled our spiritual vitality. What is Paul's counsel to us? It is the same as his word here to Timothy: Feed on the Scriptures until they are inbred (that is the actual meaning of the phrase "constantly nourished"); avoid controversial fables (Paul was perhaps referring to Jewish apocalyptic literature written during the intertestamental period) which did not elicit faith or spiritual health. Avoid this junk food, says Paul. Nourish yourself instead on "the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following."

Years ago on a trip to Israel we came to Caesarea Philippi, which lies at the foot of snow-capped Mt. Hermon. There is a beautiful waterfall there where water from the pure melted snow from the mountain drops about 50 feet to the pool below. It was here that David wrote the words of Psalm 42, "Deep calls to deep at the sound of Thy waterfalls." These falls are the source of the Sea of Galilee, a sea teeming with life and vitality. This sea empties into the Jordan River, which winds its way southward some 70 miles until it empties into the Dead Sea. During that journey, the water picks up impurities of all kinds, and then it pours into the Dead Sea, which has twice the salt content of the great Salt Lake in Utah. Water from the Dead Sea is poisonous and totally useless for anything. Think about that for a moment. The Dead Sea comes from the same source as the beautiful cleansing falls of Caesarea Philippi! But that water cannot sustain life because it is too far removed from the source.

It is the same with American Christianity. We think the Scriptures are too demanding to study and grasp, so we extract from the pure Word the majesty of its history and context and process it with endless human additives and impurities until all its mystery is removed. Then we package the results in banal "how-to" principles, to be consumed in bite-size pieces, like Chicken McNuggets. Do you think this will sustain you when you are diagnosed with cancer? No, you will find it sadly lacking. Feed instead at Mt. Hermon and Caesarea Philippi. Feed on the pure Scriptures.

On Thursday evening last we gathered as elders to pray for Ray Stedman in light of his newly diagnosed cancer. As I looked around the room I was struck by the fact that every man present had a Bible in his hands. No one was holding a Christian magazine or a book on how to live the successful Christian life. Everyone was reading and praying from the pure Word of God, especially the Psalms. This is what sustains us when the crisis strikes.

Natan Sharansky lived at the source, and the Book of Psalms sustained him during his imprisonment. This book was the tool by which he broke out of prison to his real life, and it was the tool that prevented the KGB from imposing their world on him. They took away his Psalms finally, and he went on a hunger strike to get them back. During this intense struggle that lasted for one year, he spent 186 days in a punishment cell. He emerged a mere skeleton of a man, weighing only 35 kg (77 lbs). But Sharansky won in the end. After receiving his Psalms back, he wrote, "I took my Psalm book and for days on end,

with photographs of my dear ones in front of me, I recited all one hundred and fifty of King David's Psalms, syllable by syllable."

Watch your diet, says the apostle to Timothy. Cut out the junk food and feed on the Scriptures.

There is another requirement: it is exercise.

**(c) With proper exercise: Discipline unto godliness**

**But discipline yourself unto godliness, for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and [also] for the [life] to come. It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the savior of all men, especially believers. (4:7b-10)**

Every time Timothy fed on the Scriptures, he should exercise himself in godliness, says Paul. The word for gymnasium comes from the Greek word that Paul uses here for discipline. Timothy should apply the same resolve, discipline, sweat and energy to applying the truth to his life, as a gymnast does in training for the Olympics.

Why should the Christian work so hard at becoming godly? Because godliness is more profitable than athletics, according to Paul. It has more value because it is applicable to every sphere of life; it is not limited. In college, I knew an outstanding gymnast who gave himself completely to his discipline. He had everything a gymnast needed: form, grace, and excellence. But his discipline did not impart meaning to his life. It applied only to athletics; it did nothing for his soul. Later he began taking drugs and he ended up a social outcast. Dorothy Hammel, winner of the Olympic gold medal in ice skating some years ago, was asked how winning had prepared her for life. The interviewer was surprised to hear her say that it didn't help her at all to handle the pressures of living in the public sphere. Godliness, however, is applicable to all spheres. Take young mothers, for instance. They practice godliness in the secrecy of the home where they labor to raise godly children. I believe this is what qualifies women to serve in the highest offices in the land.

And this discipline is beneficial in all ages—it lasts forever! As a gymnast I worked out four hours a day for seven years. But what did that discipline get me? I ended my high school years with a concussion, and I ended my college career with cracked vertebrae. Practicing godliness, however, makes a huge difference not only in this life, it carries over into eternity. This is why Paul is so adamant here, and why he says, "It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the savior of all men, especially believers." Spiritual discipline is applicable in all spheres of life and it is beneficial in all ages. This is why we should accept it fully and give it our every effort.

Thus Paul "labors and strives." "Labor" speaks of the toil and sweat of the farmer; "strive" is where we get the English word agony. He agonizes as an athlete does during the intense struggle of an athletic contest so that he might be godly. As he does so he fixes his hope on God who rewards his servants. And Paul understands that it is godliness that is the prime tool that leads people to salvation. This is why Christians dare not compromise, and why Timothy must give himself to the discipline that leads to godliness.

When he was a student at the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, Natan Sharansky had written a thesis entitled "Simulating the Decision-Making Process in Conflict Situations Based on the Chess End-game." He determined to employ the same strategy in facing the KGB as he had applied in chess. First, he wrote out his goals: he would study the enemy, expose him, and never compromise (aid) him. Thus he had to refuse the few creature comforts, such as tea or more frequent family visits, which were offered him on occasion by the KGB. He predetermined his moves and then chose the hard road

of never compromising. One year before his captivity ended he even refused a medical release from prison. Instead he demanded that they release him because his imprisonment was unjust. They refused, and so he went back to his cell for one more year.

After I read this, I had to ask myself, do I give this kind of effort to loving my family? Do I predetermine my choices and suffer this way in order to be godly? Natan Shanarsky did. He knew his response would affect not just him but the whole world. He dared not compromise. This is what Paul says to Timothy, “For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the savior of all men, especially believers.”

What would be the result if Timothy did this?

**(d) The result: A powerful influence**

**Prescribe and teach these things. Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but show yourself an *example* of those who believe in speech, conduct, love, faith [and] purity. (4:11-12)**

Even though Timothy was young (perhaps in his early- to mid-thirties), godliness, which was the result of continual study and diligent application, would win him respect even from older people. The most powerful way to influence others is not by engaging in coercion or demanding exhortations, but by example. A friend told me recently that he had rebelled against his parents in his teen years. One night when he came out of his bedroom and looked into the livingroom, he saw his parents kneeling in prayer—and he knew what they were praying for. Twenty years later he recalled this scene and wept as he remembered his parents’ faithful example. This is what will change our children and lead them to righteousness—our godly example to them, without coercion or threats.

Thus Paul counsels Timothy to focus on his own spiritual health. With the right diet and exercise, his influence on the world would take care of itself.

The apostle now turns from Timothy’s personal life to his ministry.

## II. Stay focused in your ministry (4:13-15)

**Until I come, give attention to the reading [of Scripture], to exhortation, and teaching. (4:13)**

**(a) Focus on the proclamation of the Word**

If the secret to spiritual vitality is God’s Word, it is the same in ministry. The source of life in ministry is living at the source—the Word of God. In every setting the Word is to be read, taught, and applied. This, says Paul, is the main thing.

I believe that a terrible demonic deception governs the American church today. There is a lie in circulation that says the way for leaders to be influential is to become what I call “transportation engineers.” This lie says that it is the task of Christian leaders to be always on the lookout over the vast vineyard of life, searching for the most strategic places to exert influence. Leaders are then to be engaged in transplanting God’s little saplings from their own environment into these new and different arenas. The problem is that these bare-root saplings are ripped out of their normal settings and then they are expected to engage, with computer-like speed, in some religious activity. But they are still in shock because they have been bare-rooted and no one has fed them; they have not been nurtured and cared for. Not only are these saplings bereft of influence, they shrivel up and go into shock. Christian leaders are not transportation engineers! They must be gardeners who feed the vineyards with the heavenly waters of God’s Word. This is where saplings can take root and grow. Afterwards God will have no trouble transplanting them according to his own will.

This is what this church is all about. We are not in the business of building a stage for anyone so that he or she might have influence. We

must gather together to hear the Word of God. As you grow in godliness, God will give you a stage so that you will have influence. There is no secret to what we do here in PBC/Cupertino. If you come to the elders’ meetings, you will hear us study the book of Ephesians so that we might be cleansed and encouraged. At our staff meetings we study Lamentations. When I meet with my interns, we translate the Psalms. There are no secret organizational planning strategies. We meet together to feed on God’s Word, trusting him to do the rest.

So Paul tells Timothy to focus on the word of God. And second,

**(b) Focus on the exercise of your spiritual gift**

**Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. (4:14)**

When Timothy was ordained, it was the apostolic practice to lay hands on those being ordained. Timothy, however, was timid by nature, and at times he neglected his gift because he was intimidated by others. This is why Paul had to write the admonition, “do not neglect the spiritual gift within you.”

Why do we need these divine gifts? Isn’t it enough that we have the written Word? Supposing you went to a symphony concert and all the musicians merely sat looking at the sheet music in front of them. Then the conductor announced, “We’re going to have a sheet music study today.” That would be a boring symphony concert, wouldn’t it? It is the same with the Word of God. The Scriptures come to life through the exercise of divine gifts. The life of Christ is made manifest to the body through those who are gifted. This is why a church can be doctrinally sound but dead as a door nail—because people are not using their gifts. Do not neglect your gift, and do not ask for permission to use it. Just use it, and then watch the Word come to life in the congregation.

**(c) The value of diligence**

**Take pains with these things; be [absorbed] in them, so that your progress may be evident to all. (4:15)**

Just as personal godliness takes discipline, so does faithfulness in ministry. And Paul tells Timothy that if he is faithful, his influence will take care of itself. George Whitefield, an Englishman, was the most influential person in America prior to the Revolution. He did more than any other man to unite the Colonies spiritually. When he was 17 years old, he began writing a journal documenting his spiritual journey with God, and when his book was circulated in New England, the Christians who read it discovered that this young man had abundant life in the Spirit. Later, when he came to that part of the country, thousands flocked to hear him.

A man named Nathan Cole heard of Whitefield’s ministry. Word had it that Whitefield preached like one of the apostles, and Cole longed to hear him. Whitefield’s visits to Hartford and Wethersfield raised hopes that he would also appear in Middletown, where Cole lived. One morning a messenger raced through Middletown with news that Whitefield would preach out-of-doors that morning at ten o’clock. Cole’s response was immediate:

I was in my field at work. I dropped my tool...and ran home to my wife, telling her to make ready quickly to go on and hear Mr. Whitefield preach at Middletown, then ran to my horse with all my might, fearing that I should be too late. Having my horse, I with my wife soon mounted... We improved every moment to get along as if we were fleeing for our lives, all the while fearing we should be too late to hear the sermon, for we had twelve miles to ride.

After the ride, the Coles made it to the Connecticut River, by Middletown:

I saw before me a cloud of fog arising. I first thought it came from the great river, but as I came nearer the road I heard a noise of

horses' feet coming down the road, and this cloud was a cloud of dust made by the horses' feet...When I came with about 20 rods of the road, I could see men and horses slipping along in the cloud like shadows, and as I drew nearer it seemed like a steady stream of horses and their riders, scarcely a horse more than his length behind another, all of a lather and foam with sweat, their breath rolling out of their nostrils every jump. Every horse seemed to go with all his might for the saving of souls. It made me tremble to see the sight.

Looking at the ferry boats on the river, Cole continued,

...the ferry boats running swift backward and forward bringing over loads of people, and the oars rowed nimble and quick. Everything, men, horses, and boats, seemed to be struggling for life. All along the 12 miles I saw no man at work in his field but all seemed to be gone.

Then Whitefield climbed the scaffolding assembled for his visit. Cole wrote, "...he looked almost angelical: a young slim, slender youth, before some thousands of people with a bold undaunted countenance." Soon Cole was caught up in the moment by a master of gesture and presence who "looked as if he was clothed with authority from the Great God." So powerful was the sermon, Cole concluded, that it "gave me a heart wound...I saw that my righteousness would not save me." (Harry Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*).

When George Whitefield died, he had the largest funeral in the Colonies until the death of George Washington. What was the secret of his ministry? It was the Word of God, and the exercise of his spiritual gift. This is the kind of life that draws people to Christ.

Just in case Timothy doesn't get the point, Paul restates it in his summary.

### III. Focus on staying focused (4:16)

**Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.**

Don't allow anything to dissuade you, says Paul. Keep the main thing the main thing.

#### (a) Both life and ministry require *focus* on God's Word

Our personal life and our ministry require us to be focused on God's Word. So we must cut out the fat. Turn off the TV, put aside all those magazines, and be still and read from the source itself. Don't be satisfied with droplets from the Jordan. Go to the headwaters underneath Mt. Hermon and let the rush of water cleanse you. And it's not enough that we Christians have light, we must have heat too. Allow the light to penetrate you until it burns. Then you will discover a consuming flame of love in your hearts that burns away all the dross and creates in its place holy passions.

#### (b) Both take rigorous *discipline*

Godliness in your own life and the exercise of your gift take dogged determination. Struggle and sweat are required if you are to prove faithful. Don't expect an easy ride, and don't expect godliness to be your natural drift. Use every external means available to you to help you. That's not legalism; that's being smart! I use good reading to stimulate me to godliness. Oftentimes when my soul feels dead, I read a good biography. Then I find my spirit being moved again. And I never forsake weekly meetings for fellowship where I derive cleansing and vitality. Thirdly, I am constantly seeking opportunities to use my spiritual gifts. I don't wait to be asked. I am always seeking to make myself available. This is what helps keep me on track.

Natan Sharansky shares that now that he is in the free world, he finds it much more difficult to remain focused and disciplined. He writes,

In the punishment cell, life was much simpler. Every day brought only one choice: good or evil, white or black, saying yes or no to the KGB. Moreover, I had all the time I needed to think about these choices, to concentrate on the most fundamental problems of existence, to test myself in fear, in hope, in belief, in love. And now, lost in thousands of mundane choices, I suddenly realize that there's no time to reflect on the bigger questions. How to enjoy the vivid colors of freedom without losing the existential depth I felt in prison? How to absorb the many sounds of freedom without allowing them to jam the stirring call of the shofar that I heard so clearly in the punishment cell? And, most important, how, in all these thousands of meetings, handshakes, interviews, and speeches, to retain that unique feeling of the interconnection of human souls which I discovered in the Gulag? These are the questions I must answer in my new life, which is only beginning.

#### (c) In both cases *influence* takes care of itself

Notice that spirituality comes first, in secret, in quiet, while you are alone. There the discipline of godliness is worked out in the normal course of life. This is what leads to influence. In America we have reversed the order. We work so hard to have influence that we lose our spirituality. Then, sensing that loss, we become more aggressive in asserting it. But it is all in vain. Influence is a gift given to you by others because of what they see in you. Gary Vanderet says, "You worry about your own spiritual depth and let God worry about the breadth of your ministry."

During his eleven years in a prison cell did Natan Sharansky ever seek to be influential? Of course not. Even if he had been seeking influence (which he was not) his prison cell would be a strange and futile platform from which to mount his campaign. But when he was released, the world flocked to him because they recognized he was a man of integrity, a hero who refused to compromise his ideals of liberty and justice. When his plane arrived at the airport in Jerusalem, he spoke by telephone to President Reagan. Then he was carried on the shoulders of an excited crowd milling in front of the Western (Wailing) Wall. There, clasping his Book of Psalms, he gave thanks for his deliverance, while millions in the West looked on.

My friends, keep the main thing the main thing!

In conclusion, I want to say that simply because one is a pastor, one can never assume that spiritual growth will be automatic or that influence will be guaranteed by title. Rather, spiritual growth is a dynamic process that is constantly threatened by the Satanic forces of distraction (see Acts 6:2, 4). How easy it is for pastors to be distracted from their real calling and be negligent in their study of the Word! How often have we forsaken the task of feeding the flock in order to be organizers of programs which, when launched, may look innovative, but ultimately are void of spirit and life! Spiritual growth for the pastor, and his influence upon the flock, are based on his continual feeding off the divine life through the Word of God and through the constant exercising of his spiritual gifts. To these two things a pastor is to give ultimate priority, toil, pre-occupation and endurance. In so doing, he will prove the eternal value of these things by being a true example to the flock of godliness in all areas. May we repent of our sin and lay hold of God's grace so that we may be faithful and focused.

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1 Timothy 5:1-2; 6:1-2

Ninth Message

Brian Morgan

July 12, 1992

# STRENGTHENING FAMILY TIES

*SERIES: HOW TO RESTORE A CHURCH*

The bonding together of two churches separated by the oceans, our own church and the church in Romania over the past four years, has been nothing less than a miracle of God in my eyes. We come from completely different cultures and economic backgrounds—one a free people and the other, up until recently, a persecuted nation under the dictator's yoke—and yet we have become one family under God.

I have been privileged to come to know one Romanian brother, Nellu Beg. This man was the spiritual son of the late Traian Dorz, the leader of the Lord's Army. He and I have become close brothers in Christ ever since my first visit to Romania when he was our guide. Since the overthrow of Communism last December, we have been able to correspond by letter, and my heart always gets a lift when I receive a letter from him. Earlier this year, I mailed to him a copy of the denomination's hymnal, which we had printed in the U.S., and here is what he wrote in response:

Dearest brother Brian,

Today I saw the last edition of Lord's Army songs by Traian Dorz. I took it, I turned over it. I embraced it and I kissed it. Then I wept and prayed for you and your family—for all that your beloved church did to contribute to this wonderful work of compassionate love.

Together with the book I embraced each of you as the Carpathian mountains embrace Romania. Only God could reward you for all you have done for us. Your love is beyond any expectation, you understood fully our needs and have always been a blessing for us. I'm so much indebted and grateful for all your love that I vainly seek adequate words in my modest vocabulary. I have few and poor words but my soul is overwhelmed with choicest feelings.

On the day when I went to our meeting with the books, there was a great festival. I read to the brethren your wonderful foreword about our much beloved brother Traian Dorz, and I related to them all the story of our friendship, how wonderful gracious was the Lord with us during our meetings—that one from the Retezot Mountains and those from Costesti. There were many tears of grace in our meeting and we began to pray that the Lord would keep you all in His divine grace, and that He rewards you for all the wonderful good you made to us.

Our meetings enjoyed a strong freshness following the distribution of the books, the song that warms and binds all the souls could be now interpreted by all the brethren, fulfilling the psalmists words: "Let everything that has breath, praise the Lord." Every brother and sister from our meetings that desired for a long time a book of songs has it now and is very grateful.

I think that one could hardly find a better way to invest this money as the printing of these books, for this investment aims even to eternity. The holiness of your love and the delicacy of your soul

surpasses every behavior that we could imagine, resembling only those from the choicest company of our Master.

It is too much. I have no more words, nor voice. I have only tears and longing. I'm longing of you, as I'm longing of eternity, of our Lord...

With much grateful love,

Your brother, Beg.

I feel unworthy to be loved by this man, but the ties that bind us are unbreakable in the family of Jesus Christ. And this is the theme of our message this morning—strengthening family ties in the body of Christ.

In our studies in the apostle Paul's first letter to Timothy we have seen that Paul is instructing Timothy on how to build and restore the church in Ephesus. Last week, we learned that the apostle had as his first priority the reading, studying and exposition of God's Word so that it would come alive through the exercise of divine gifts and be applied to hearts. Every person in the congregation was to learn to feed continually on the Word, and every ministry was to have the Word as its focus. The second task of leadership was to draw together the body of Christ into a family, creating strong bonds of love in the process. In our text today, 5:1–6:2, Paul's focus is to instruct Timothy how as a pastor he is to relate to various groups within the flock. The goal is to create an atmosphere of love where every member of the body feels just as precious as he or she is supposed to in their own personal families.

The reason for this is that, with the coming of the Messiah, the people of God were reconstituted into a spiritual seed whose bonds were stronger than bonds of blood. No longer were there to be distinctions—sexual, age, social, national or otherwise. Thus, before the church can have any effect on its community with the gospel, it had to have strong relationships as a family. This is usually the reason why people either attend a certain church or why they leave it for another assembly, isn't it? Does the church demonstrate an atmosphere of family, of mutual acceptance, with strong bonds of love one for another? Almost always this is the test, for strong teaching alone is not sufficient; there must also be a bonding that takes place among the members. What a great need the church can meet in this respect, especially in our modern day when the family unit is under attack on every front.

Paul begins with a word on how Christians should relate to one another.

## I. Respect for fathers and mothers (5:1-2)

**Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but [rather] appeal to him as a father, the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, the younger women as sisters, in all purity. (NASB)**

Pastors do not have the right, says Paul, even by virtue of their office, to strike out verbally against older men or women. On the contrary, older people are to be appealed to with the same respect that is shown to fathers and mothers. In the church, older men and women should sense that they are being treated with the same deep respect as physical parents.

In the Jewish tradition, parents were treated with the utmost respect. The commandment, “Honor your mother and father,” was taken very seriously indeed. “Honor” means, give them social weight; don’t treat them lightly. Why? Because they are the source of your life both physically and, in the case of Israel, spiritually, as parents were responsible for a child’s spiritual instruction. Thus children were to grow up sensing they owed their life to their parents. Give weight to their words, therefore, and treat them with dignity. You may make your appeal to them, but do so with respect and humility.

My 83- and 80-year-old parents were here last weekend to visit our family. I noticed that we changed our whole family routine for days just because they were present. Whenever either of them made a request, I automatically gave heed to what they asked for. Never once did I rebuke them. It is not my place to do so. Parents are to be held in honor.

Paul felt that Timothy needed only a gentle reminder, but in our day we could use a whole sermon on this subject. One of the ways we can facilitate this respect is to create a stage for the older folk to tell their stories. Older people love to tell *their* stories! I do this on a regular basis in our men’s fellowship group. A few weeks ago, during a retreat, I invited one of the older men to share his story with the group. Though he intimated that he was shy and not used to speaking in front of groups, we urged him on, and he told his story—the whole story! As he did so, a sense of family came over the whole group as if a father was speaking to his 15 sons. Now when he comes to our weekly meeting he enters the room with the sense of delight and dignity of a father bonded to his sons.

So Paul tells Timothy to treat the older folk with the same dignity he would show his parents.

And how should he treat the younger men? The apostle has a word here, too.

## II. Equality among brothers (5:1)

**Appeal to the younger men as brothers. Treat older men as fathers, now the younger men are to be treated as brothers.**

If the older men are to be appealed to as fathers, the younger men are to be appealed to as brothers. Thus, the fact that one occupies the office of elder or pastor does not give him authority to dominate others, for we are all brothers. Jesus was severe in applying this principle to his apostolic band whenever they sought to upstage one another. Here is what he said to them, from the gospel of Mark: “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant” (Mark 10:42-43).

The early church learned this lesson well. They had a freedom to use their gifts without the permission or strict regulation of the apostles. Each one followed the direct leading of the Lord. Philip, a layman, was the first to break into Samaria with the gospel. Later, following the apostles’ laying on of hands to seal that work, the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, not the apostles, and directed him to

minister to the Ethiopian eunuch in the Gaza desert. This is the story of Acts, isn’t it? The leadership always seemed to be playing catch-up with what the saints were doing. The same was true for Paul. Though he was an apostle, he did not dominate others with his visions for them. Look at what he wrote to the Corinthians about Apollos: “But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity” (1 Cor 16:2). Even though Paul was an apostle, he allowed Apollos to make up his own mind as to the timing of his visit to the Corinthians.

Ray Stedman felt that this text was so neglected in the American church he wrote the article, “A Pastor’s Authority,” for the *Moody Monthly*. The original title was “Should A Pastor Play Pope?” (probably changed because it may have seemed a bit too pointed). Ray’s point was that the Reformation was fought to remove papal hierarchical authority and to recover the priesthood of all believers, but now, a few centuries later, the church had set about replacing papal authority by having a “pope” (a senior pastor who oversees everything) in *every* Protestant church. We don’t find this notion in any of Paul’s instructions to pastors here in 1 Timothy, however.

What authority, then, does a pastor or elder have? The principle we have operated on here at PBC is that when elders gather to pray and humble themselves, they accomplish their task of finding the mind of Christ through their unanimity. When an elder steps outside that circle his only authority is that of a brother, or at best an older brother. And what authority do you grant to an older brother? Well, you obey him only when he is right! Ray Stedman modeled this principle faithfully during his years at PBC. At times we would meet together and he would share with me any concerns he had about my ministry. Afterwards, I would have the freedom go to the Lord and pray, asking what had come from him and what had come from Ray Stedman. And that would be the end of the discussion; there were never any politicking and power plays employed. The mark of greatness is not being *right*, but allowing the Lord the *right* of way in people’s lives to set things *right*. We must never usurp his place.

And what is our task as pastors? I like to describe the body of Christ as a symphony orchestra. All the members are equipped with instruments, in this case divine gifts, and pastors are merely the music teachers. Our task is to teach the flock how to read sheet music (the Word of God) and to encourage them to carefully pay attention to the Conductor of the symphony, who is not the pastor, but the Lord! He alone is the One with the authority to direct the implementation of the gifts, and he does so in perfect harmony.

If we take the apostle’s advice and treat the older folk with the respect due to parents, and younger men as equals, that doesn’t leave much room for a power trip, does it?

We come now to Paul’s word on how we should treat sisters in Christ.

## III. Protection and care for sisters (5:1)

**Appeal to the younger women as sisters, in all purity.**

Pastors are to treat the younger women also as equals within the family; they are like sisters. Then he adds the extra caution, “in all purity.” Pastors need to be especially circumspect in their relationships with younger women, knowing their own vulnerability and the ease with which they could misuse their office for sexual advancement. Give younger women the affection and protection you would your own sisters, is Paul’s advice.

How brothers should care for their sisters is expressed beautifully in the Song of Songs:

**“We had a little sister,  
And she had no breasts;  
What shall we do for our sister  
On the day when she is spoken for?  
If she is a wall,  
We shall build on her a battlement of silver;  
But if she is a door,  
We shall barricade her with planks of cedar.”** (Song 8:8-9)

If she is a “wall” (if she is impervious to male advances), her brothers will decorate the wall and beautify it in an effort to increase her good character by praise. If she is a “door,” however (if she is easily seduced), they will “barricade her with planks of cedar”—they will build walls of protection around her. The lesson here is that a healthy home is characterized by its safety, protection and praise.

Tragedy ensues when brothers fail in this regard. When Jacob’s daughter Dinah went to visit the daughters of the land of Shechem, the son of the prince took her and raped her. Where were her brothers? It’s obvious they didn’t care enough for her to protect her when she was in danger.

What is even worse is when brothers are not only passive and fail to protect their sisters, but some actually exploit and abuse them, engaging in the crime of incest rather than nurturing and protecting them. In the OT we have the terrible story of David’s children, Amnon, and his virgin sister Tamar. Amnon lusted for his sister. He faked an illness so that Tamar would be his nurse, and when she came to him he tried to violate her. Tamar responded: “No, my brother, do not violate me, for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this disgraceful thing! As for me, where could I get rid of my reproach? And as for you, you will be like one of the fools in Israel...” However, he would not listen to her; since he was stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her. Then Amnon hated her with a very great hatred; for the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, ‘Get up, go away!’” (2 Sam 13:12-15). What a shameful ending to a brother-sister relationship.

In our culture, scenarios such as this have become all too common. Dr. Dan B. Allender, author of *The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse*, says that one of the worst elements of this kind of tragedy is that frequently this crime occurs in the very place where young girls are supposed to feel safe and protected. Instead of protection they are subject to betrayal not only by the abuser, but by those who allow it to happen. This kind of betrayal has devastating consequences. The greater the trust, the greater the damage. Most devastating is when the father is involved. Dr. Allender writes that the father “is called to be a secure, trustworthy, and life-generating surrogate for God until the child develops the capacity to see his or her heavenly Father... The victim’s struggle to trust will be proportionately related to the extent her parent(s) failed to protect and nurture her as a child.”

In reality, pastors and elders are spiritual fathers in the church, thus they have the same potential to inflict this kind of damage on the souls of their flock if they use their office for sexual advancement. When Dr. Allender was writing this book, his 8-year-old daughter asked him, “Daddy why are you interested in sexual abuse?” Before he could answer, she said, “Daddy, do abused people have walls in their hearts that keep them from being happy, and will they have less

bricks in their walls after reading your book?” When he heard this, he wept.

I am deeply grateful that there are a number of women in our church, Pat Patmor, Judy Halliday, and Mary Ann Barnett, to mention a few, who have wept over this kind of tragedy. They want PBC to be a safe place, not only to protect the younger virgins, but to heal the brokenhearted. They have established a counselors training seminar designed to equip women to teach and counsel in this area. Next October, they will stage an all-day seminar on sexual abuse. But the real ministry goes on behind closed doors, in the safe confines of the counseling office. These women have spent many hours counseling more than 100 women who have been subjected to sexual abuse. One of the sisters told me recently that at times she wakes up at night weeping for these abused women, and she gives herself to prayer for them. What an inestimable contribution to repair bonds of love in the family of God! It’s one thing to protect, but a greater thing to repair the damage of a darkened soul.

So we have Paul’s word concerning fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers. Next, he turns to a special class of needy in the church in Ephesus—the widows—and how to honor them as members of God’s family; and then he has some words for elders. Because these texts are lengthy, we will deal with them separately in the weeks to come. For now, I want to jump ahead, to chapter 6, to the role of slaves in the church of Jesus Christ.

#### IV. Taking the family spirit to work! (6:1-2)

**Let all who are under the yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine may not be spoken against. And let those who have believers as their masters not be disrespectful to them, because they are brethren, but let them serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these [principles].**

Slaves constituted a large proportion of the population of the Roman Empire. In fact, it is estimated that about one-third of the population of the city of Rome were slaves. People became slaves through a variety of ways—as prisoners of war, condemned men, through debt, or kidnapping, or being sold into slavery by their parents. And to add that number, many thousands were born into slavery. In the ancient world, slaves were considered to be non-persons, even by the classical philosophers. Aristotle, for instance, said. “A slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave.” Cato’s advice was, “Sell worn-out oxen, blemished cattle,...old tools, an old slave, a sickly slave, and whatever else is useless.” In his will, a soldier named Dryton left to his relations “two female slaves and a cow in equal shares for their households.” The cow and the slave were treated on precisely the same level! (Michael Green). What is the message of the gospel to such unfortunates? It is that Christ has “redeemed” them. This is a slave market term declaring that Christ has bought them out of slavery and purchased their freedom from sin through his precious blood. Many slaves who heard this gospel became Christians. They became real persons with worth and dignity. They were invited to eat at the same agape feasts, they took the same elements in the Holy Communion, and, as bond or free, they faced martyrdom together with the free men and women of the church.

What are Paul’s instructions to slaves now that they were Christians? Rather than fomenting a violent revolution or endorsing the status quo, the apostle says they had a place of privileged service to

produce a quiet revolution: as slaves they could enhance the kingdom of God. They should remember that Jesus took on the role of a slave to bring about this kingdom. The principle is obvious: slaves should regard their oppressive work environment as a wonderful opportunity for ministry. Thus they should take the family atmosphere of love and grace which they enjoyed in church and infiltrate the whole world with it, turning that work environment into a family atmosphere. Paul says that slaves should apply the same commandment used in the home toward parents to their Roman masters. Honor is to replace ill-will and dishonesty. They should not be lazy, but rather be willing to serve, to work with integrity and industry. And if the slave's master was a Christian, the slave should not be resentful. He should serve him all the more faithfully because his master was a brother. The result would be to bring glory to God through his work, while the body of Christ was built up in the process.

What a radical impact it would have if we applied this word in the workplace! Failure in this area discredits the God we serve and the gospel we preach. Nothing is more important than the name of God and his gospel.

First century slaves who had come to Christ treated these principles very seriously, and the result was that they had a great impact for the kingdom of God. Slaves were the teachers in the Roman households, even the households of the emperors, thus many of them took the opportunity to teach the gospel to both their students and masters. Quoting from Michael Green's book, *Evangelism in the Early Church*: "Acilius Glabrio who was consul with Trajan in A.D. 91, was charged with having atheistic, and Jewish ways, and being a revolutionary (common accusations against the Christians). He was forced to fight with a lion by Emperor Domitian...At all events, Glabrio killed the lion, was released, but wisely went into voluntary exile. Still the Emperor had him executed. He was buried in a family vault which not long afterwards became a Christian catacomb." This man who held a high position in the Roman Empire had been reached for Christ through a slave who was in his service.

I think the modern church has failed in this area. Christians should be encouraged to see that their greatest ministry lies in the workplace. What many are advised, however, is that "real" ministry lies elsewhere. Thus they merely pay their dues at work and are pressed to leave that natural setting to join some artificial program for outreach. But when Christians do this, everything suffers: work suffers because it is half-hearted; ministry suffers because it is half-baked; and the family suffers because its head is over-extended. Your greatest arena for ministry is where you work, so turn your workplace into a family setting.

Dana Harris, one of our former interns, is working at Stanford Institute, in charge of hospitality for diplomats from Eastern European countries. She is their "slave," in effect, while they are at Stanford. She organizes their social engagements and travels with them to conferences, giving her whole heart to her work, so that her workplace becomes the kind of family atmosphere that Paul is referring to here. The result is that there are more than a dozen cities in Eastern Europe which she now can call home. What a mistake it would be to take her from that natural setting and ask her to become involved in some artificial program.

Here Paul says that when the church acts like a family bonded in love, it becomes a most effective tool for outreach. More than ever before our world is becoming increasingly violent, abusive, shameful, and oppressive. Everyone is longing for a safe place they can call home, a place that will honor them and grant them dignity, a place where they can tell their story. In our modern world, I feel the only arena where this can happen is the church.

Some months ago, Jolyn Canty shared with me a World Vision video that was photographed in Romanian orphanages, including places where handicapped children are left to die. The video featured one little girl, Petronella, who had no arms (her hands were attached to her elbows). Jolyn was so moved by the video she took it to her Christian school, where they had a Romania Day. She asked the class to pray for Petronella, and the children responded. A few weeks ago, I was invited to a party which the Cantys were having for their extended family in honor of a Romanian pastor who was returning home. There were about 50 or 60 people present, young and old, fathers, mothers and children. Many were allowed to tell of their involvement with Romania, and it amazed me how everyone felt deeply significant and overwhelmed by the Lord's grace to have a place in this ministry. But the greatest surprise came when I was escorted over to the swimming pool to see a joyous little four-year-old splashing and singing in the water. I gazed at her and then said to my host, "Isn't that Pretronella?" "Yes," he replied. Apparently our Romanian brother had secured for her a medical visa to leave the country (a very rare occurrence), and had matched her with a family that is now laboring to adopt her. Filled with excitement, I ran up to the little girl and looked into her eyes and said, "Aren't you Petronella?" "No," she insisted, "my name is not Petronella; it is Hope. My name is Hope!" I wept.

This is the work of the church—taking the abused and the orphans and bringing them into the family of Christ, a family whose bonds are stronger than death.

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Catalog No. 890

1 Timothy 5:3-16

Tenth Message

Brian Morgan

July 19, 1992

# WHO CARES FOR WIDOWS?

*SERIES: HOW TO RESTORE A CHURCH*

One night a couple of months ago, I left one of my favorite homes in this area to return home around 11 o'clock. I was tired, but I was spiritually refreshed by the fellowship I had enjoyed while meeting with some brothers in Christ that evening. I fell into bed exhausted, knowing that I had an early breakfast appointment next day. During the night I was awakened by a commotion outside, but I soon fell asleep again. When I got up at 6 a.m., however, I saw several police cars in front of my home. The police had cordoned off the area, and yellow tape was strung around the intersection. A few moments later, I learned why. About 100 yards from my front door a blue tarp lay draped over a body. A 22-year-old mother of two children had been abducted by her boyfriend a few days earlier in the very parking lot of the restaurant where I was due to have breakfast. He had stabbed her to death, and dumped her body near my home.

As a father and pastor who is trying to cultivate life with my wife and three daughters in my home, and seeking to establish community and life in the homes and restaurants of this area, I could not help but sense the bitter irony of the situation I was witness to on my street. Just a few yards away, hidden under a tarpaulin, lay the sad and bitter fruits of a dark, twisted, hurting world. I was shaken by the experience, and I was saddened to think that my home could have been a refuge for the young woman whose body was now lying in the street. Almost on my own doorstep I was confronted yet again with the realization that establishing loving homes is probably the most important work of evangelism that the church can be involved in.

As we have been discovering in the past few weeks, the apostle Paul in his first letter to Timothy has some foundational truths to share regarding family life. Here he is instructing Timothy on the practical side of how to restore the church in the city of Ephesus. Two key things, says Paul, were necessary to accomplishing this—the priority of the Word of God, and the creation of a family atmosphere in the church. Members were to be built up spiritually by the Word, and they were to be tied together in bonds of love. Pastors should treat older members with the same honor they accorded fathers and mothers, while younger people were to be accorded the dignity of being treated as equals, just as sisters and brothers treat one another as equals in a loving family situation.

Within this context of his instructions regarding the family, therefore, in the text to which we come today, Paul turns his attention to a special class within the church, that of widows.

Let us begin by reading the complete text. First Timothy 5:3-16:

**Honor widows who are widows indeed, but if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family, and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. If any woman who is a believer has [dependent] widows, let her assist them, and let not the church be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed. Now she who is a widow indeed, and who has been left alone, has fixed her hope on God, and contin-**

**ues in entreaties and prayers night and day. But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives. Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach. If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, [then] he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever. Let a widow be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, a one man kind of woman, having a reputation for good works; if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, if she has devoted herself to every good work. But refuse [to put] younger widows [on the list], for when they feel sensual desires in disregard to Christ, they want to get married, incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge. And at the same time they also learn [to be] idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper. Therefore, I want younger [widows] to get married, bear children, manage [their] household, to give the enemy no occasion for reproach; for some have already turned to follow Satan. If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, let her assist them and let not the church be burdened so that it may assist those who are widows indeed. (NASB)**

The apostle begins this section by saying that widows should be granted honor, and he gives clear guidelines on how Timothy should set about doing this.

## I. How to honor true widows (5:3, 9)

**Honor widows who are widows indeed...let widows be put on the list...**

Godly concern and care for widows had deep roots in OT teaching. The Psalms indicate that this is a key concern of the heart of God. Note these lines from Psalm 68, for instance:

**A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows,  
Is God in his holy habitation.  
God makes a home for the lonely. (Ps 68:5-6a)**

God made provision in his Law for the care of widows. At harvest time, a portion of the yield of fruit trees and vineyards was to be left so that widows, orphans and aliens could gather the gleanings. In the book of Isaiah, the care of widows actually became part of the primary definition of true religion in Israel:

**Learn to do good;  
Seek justice,  
Reprove the ruthless;  
Defend the orphan,  
Plead for the widow. (Isa 1:17)**

We find there is no change in this principle in the New Testament. Here is what James says in his epistle: "This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit [care for]

orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (James 1:27).

The church is a family, says the apostle, therefore we should give widows the same honor that we grant parents. And what does that “honor” entail? The OT is clear. Since your parents were the source of your life, do for them in their old age what they did for you when you were born: they brought you into the world and cared for you; they had a shelter all prepared for you; they held you, fed you, loved you, clothed you and even helped you go to the bathroom. The Scripture says that in their old age, parents are given social weight when their children do these things for them. Prepare a room for them, receive them with as much joy as when they welcomed you at birth, feed them, clothe them, love them and hold them, until the day you lay them in the grave. This is what gives aging parents esteem in the community.

The first century church took on this role of supporting widows. Women who had lost their husbands were put on a list and provided for financially. Beginning in Acts 6, we see that the apostles personally undertook this task until they sensed that it had become a distraction. Then they appointed deacons to do this work, and thus the office of deacon was born in the church. This practice was continued in the church in Ephesus, but a problem arose when a number of erring younger widows in their new-found freedom became gossips and busybodies. They fell prey to false teachers (some may even have become sexually involved with them), and began spreading false teaching while they were being maintained on the church payroll. The church was losing its impeccable reputation in the community as a result. This is Paul’s concern, and this is why he instructs Timothy on how to address this situation. Limit this honor to widows who are indeed widows, says the apostle.

Next, Paul goes on to list some guidelines to correct any abuses in this regard.

## II. The characteristics of a true widow (5:4-10, 16)

### (a) No surviving family (5:4, 16)

**Honor widows who are widows indeed, but if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family, and to make some return to their parents; for this acceptable in the sight of God...If any woman who is a believer has [dependent] widows, let her assist them, and let not the church be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.**

The home is the place where one learns responsibility. Thus Paul directs that widows who have surviving families not be put on a list for financial help. Such a practice would usurp the responsibility of surviving family members. The church should not rob the family of this school of godliness, for the training ground for true worship of God is a domestic apprenticeship. Furthermore, putting these widows on the list would limit the church’s ability to assist those who were truly needy. It is the children’s responsibility to take care for their elderly parents. While it might not always be convenient, this is what the godly insist on doing.

David in the OT is a good example for believers. He had a deep love and concern for his parents. When he was anointed to be king, his entire family came under Saul’s threat, so his parents abandoned him. Yet when his family came to David seeking protection, while he was in the cave of Adullam, he embarked on a dangerous river crossing to entrust his father and mother to the King of Moab so they would be cared for (1 Sam 22:3; Ps 27:10). Jesus is an even bet-

ter example. While he was hanging on that tree, he saw his mother nearby. Looking toward John, his disciple, he said to his mother, “Behold your son.” And to John he said, “Behold your mother.” The text goes on to say, “from that hour the disciple took her into his own household” (John 19:26-27). At the point of his own greatest need, Jesus was concerned for his mother and he made provision for her. So although it may not be convenient for you to care for your parents, in the Bible such care is seen as one of the high water marks of spirituality.

Here is Paul’s second guideline.

### (b) Age—must be elderly [60 years] (5:9)

**Let a widow be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old...**

The apostle gives Timothy apostolic authority to draw the line with regard to age. In the first century, 60 was the cultural norm for old age, and the age when remarriage was considered to be out of the question.

And now the third guideline, concerning character traits.

### (c) Character (5:5-7, 9-10)

**Now she who is a widow indeed, and who has been left alone, has fixed her hope on God, and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day. But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives. Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach.**

Support the widow, says Paul, who has learned to be dependent on God, the woman who “has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties night and day.” This is the same language that David used in the psalms. It is instructive to remember that most of the psalms were written while David was out in the wilderness, bereft of family. We recall his cry: “my mother and father have abandoned me; don’t you abandon me!” (Ps 27:9-10). God had become his father! At times, David wept through the night not because he was lonely, but because he was overjoyed that the heavenly Father was becoming his father. So too the widow in her wilderness of death and abandonment learns through the psalms to allow the Lord to become her husband. Marge Sterling is one of our newest widows. Even before her husband Bob died, she told me that God was already becoming her husband. He was doing things for her that Bob used to do, and her love for her heavenly Father was being enlarged as a result. Let us never forget that a widow’s prayers have a tremendous impact on the work of the kingdom of God on earth.

Joel Werk, our High School pastor, told me that on his recent visit to Romania, he and his father and second cousin were reflecting on the spiritual legacy of their great-grandmother. She had four sons, all of whom were dead to the things of the Spirit. The pain she felt over this led her to pray night and day, and every one of the 12 offspring of these men became Christians. In Bucharest, two of them were with Joel as they shared the gospel with young Romanians. My friend told me that he was so moved by this remembrance of his great-grandmother’s prayers that he could hardly speak.

A widow, says Paul, is to be dependent upon God. And it is required that she was faithful to her husband. The text says that she is to be the “wife of one man.” The phrase is adjectival and it would be better translated “a one man (kind of) wife.” If Paul meant “married only once,” the younger widows he instructs to remarry would be disqualifying themselves from being put “on the list” in the future. The text is asking, “Was she a faithful wife?” The purpose behind the church’s subsidizing of widows was to build bonds of faithfulness

with people. If a widow wasn't faithful to her husband, how could she be faithful in the church?

And third, a widow was to be a servant at home and in the church.

**Let a widow be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, a one man kind of woman, having a reputation for good works; if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, if she has devoted herself to every good work. (5:9-10)**

If she had children, was she a good mother who willingly undertook the labor and hardship required to raise children, or did she abandon them so that she could live in a world of ease and pleasure? If she didn't care for her own children, how could she be expected to care for spiritual children or for those outside the church?

Was she "hospitable to strangers"? Was her home always open to guests, knowing this is God's most effective tool for evangelism? Christians in the first century did not go around knocking on strangers' doors and handing them tracts to evangelize them. No, what they did was open their doors to the traveling stranger and offer him their hearts. I feel this kind of hospitality needs to be recovered in the church. We need open homes and open hearts to welcome the needy and the hurting.

And did she "wash the feet of the saints"? This can be taken in either a literal or symbolic sense. In either case, the practice is a badge of humility. The widow would take it upon herself to not only welcome her guests into the home but to cleanse them as a servant would. In the Scriptures, the washing of feet was a symbol of bringing correction and cleansing. And this is what a home is to be—a secret place of cleansing. When David's servants came to Abigail, announcing David's invitation to take her as his wife, the Scripture says, "she arose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, 'Behold, your maidservant is a maid to wash the feet of my lord's servants'" (1 Sam 25:41). And we know that on another occasion, Abigail had already washed the feet of David and with her soothing and temperate words cleansed him of his anger. A home should be a secret place of cleansing, a place where the hurting can be ministered to by washing with the Word of God.

And had the widows on the list for support in Ephesus "assisted those in distress"? Did they have a vision more encompassing than their own immediate family? Such a woman did not live merely for her own flesh and blood. Her home was a place of refuge and a shelter. In our culture she would be concerned for unwed mothers. She would fight for the unborn, the homeless, the sexually abused; and she would provide shelter for refugees. A widow who filled these qualifications—a woman who was alone in the world and ready to do good deeds—should be cared for by the church.

So Paul's advice is that Timothy trim his list. And here were the prerequisites: a widow who was being supported by the church should have no surviving family; she should be of a certain age; and she should demonstrate godly character.

Next, there must be no compromise in any of these areas, the apostle declares, as compromise would result in great danger to the church.

### III. The danger in compromising these specifications (5:8, 11-15)

#### (a) In regard to a godly lifestyle (5:6)

**But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives. Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach.**

The participle means, "one who indulges herself and leads a life of luxury and ease" (Calvin). If this warning is neglected, the body ends up subsidizing a lifestyle of indulgence, with the result that reproach falls upon the church in the eyes of the world. The church should not subsidize ungodliness. Just think what effect this admonition would have if it were applied to the world of the televangelists! Christians should never give money to support indulgence, says the apostle.

#### (b) In regard to "no surviving family" (5:8)

**If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, [then] he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.**

The church is not to allow its desire to care for widows to come in the way of individual responsibility. If we neglect our parents we are neglecting the highest commandment in human relationships, and the world will rightly call us irresponsible. This was what was going on in Jesus' day. The greedy Pharisees told their followers to inform their parents that their possessions were "corban," meaning, their goods had already been devoted to God (Mark 7:11). Of course, what the Pharisees were really asking for was that everything be turned over to them. They were "worse than unbelievers," according to Jesus. It is important to note that by saying this, Jesus was not condemning unbelievers. On the contrary, he was pointing out that if unbelievers care for their widows, how can believers fail to do the same? To do less than the world does is a denial of the faith.

I feel very grateful indeed that my wife is the epitome of responsibility in this regard. Even her name, "Emily," means "industry." When we celebrated our twentieth wedding anniversary this past June, I remember thinking that the quality I find most admirable in her is her loyal love for her family. Growing up, she did not experience this in her own family. Her parents were divorced and she had to go out on her own. But she has returned to her family what they never gave her. She has cared for six family members, all the way to their graves: her grandmother, two of our children, her mother, father, and sister. When her father was diagnosed with cancer, she immediately moved him to an apartment right across the street from our home and he ate every meal with us. As she was caring for him, her sister was diagnosed with AIDS, and Emily cared for her also up to her death. During all this time she had to say no to a lot of ministries—there were many things she could not do in the church—but there was no question that this was what we had been called to do as a family. I am reminded of what Boaz said to Ruth, "All the people of the city know that you are a woman of excellence."

Finally, Paul warns that putting younger widows on the list for financial care could be detrimental to their spiritual life.

#### (c) In regard to age (5:11-15)

**But refuse [to put] younger widows [on the list], for when they feel sensual desires in disregard to Christ, they want to get married, incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge. And at the same time they also learn [to be] idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper. Therefore, I want younger [widows] to get married, bear**

**children, manage [their] household, to give the enemy no occasion for reproach; for some have already turned to follow Satan.**

Here, the apostle's argument is that sensual desires might cause some of the younger widows in Ephesus to want to marry, thereby denying their promise to serve the Lord. Being included on the list for support probably was accompanied by a vow to serve God singlemindedly all their days. Perhaps their idleness caused them to become involved sexually with false teachers, and thus they incurred condemnation because of their previous pledge to follow Christ.

Paul is making the point that setting someone aside at an early age provides them with too much free time. Instead of cultivating a productive lifestyle, it might lead to aimlessness and idleness. Supporting people who are too young can be extremely detrimental to their character because they have too much freedom and too little responsibility. Rather than providing opportunity for the edification of others, such a practice could lead to their disruption through gossip and slander. This practice brings the church into disrepute in the eyes of the world. God wants homes to be busy and orderly, working hard to aid the many distresses that are obvious all around us.

What is the antidote to this? Younger widows should marry, raise a family and manage a home, says Paul. This is hard counsel, but it is good advice. Managing a home is a natural yoke that disciplines us in godliness. The gift of a godly husband, for instance, affords protection to his wife from the enemy.

In Luther's time, monasteries and nunneries were sources of great idleness, and sexual impurity was rampant in these places. The Reformers solved this problem by emptying the nunneries and marrying off the nuns. One nun named Catharina von Bora almost became engaged to a former student of Wittenberg, but the man changed his mind and instead married a rich woman, to Catharina's great grief. Then Luther arranged a match between Catharina and another gentleman, but she refused, and intimated to a friend that she would not object to marrying Martin himself. Luther confided to a friend, "Suddenly, and while I was occupied with far other thoughts, the Lord has plunged me into marriage." Asked why he married Catharina, he said, "I wish to please my father, to tease the Pope, and to vex the Devil!" Recovering the home for pastors was a step of tremendous importance in the kingdom of Christ. It is because the home, as we have seen, is the primary place where discipline and godliness are learned.

Thus Paul warns Timothy that compromise in any of these areas is detrimental to the church family and to the process of learning responsibility, with the result that the church suffers reproach in the eyes of the world.

I feel strongly that certain presuppositions leap from this text, principles that are unknown and therefore unpracticed by our modern-day church. I will list four of them.

## **IV. Implications for the modern church**

### **(a) The importance of purity over activity**

It seems that Paul is far more concerned about the character of the church as the vehicle for evangelism, than the number of full-time Christian workers the church can boast in. Purity is more important than activity! Note how carefully the apostle points out that the church will be brought into reproach if these guidelines are disregarded. Many detriments go hand in hand with this idea of the

church being asked to support people who are too young and too immature. We must be careful when we are presented with so many appeals to our young people to go into full time Christian work which may bypass some of the natural yokes of discipline (such as raising a family and carrying out a job) that God has put in place for the purpose of godliness.

### **(b) The basis of full-time ministry**

In the first century, church funds were very limited, thus funding was provided only for those who were considered worthy to be set aside for ministry. The church was not meant to be a welfare organization. Being supported was not a right but an honor that was achieved by few through a long and faithful record. The purpose behind supporting widows, or indeed other believers, was to grant them even more freedom to participate in an already-established ministry.

### **(c) The value of the home**

The home is the primary place where responsibility is to be learned, the crucible where the flesh is put aside. The family is God's yoke, designed to discipline us in the ministry of caring for others. Idleness, by contrast, presents the devil with a tailor-made opportunity to do his handiwork. Personally, I am grateful that I have a home, an industrious wife, and three children who keep me busy so that I have less opportunity for idleness and sin.

And the home is an excellent platform for ministry. It is a refuge from the storms of life, a place of counsel for the confused, an education center, and the chief location for evangelism. Ministry should not tear at the fabric of your home; it should enhance it. Here at PBC/Cupertino we feel constrained by the limited size of our building, but we should not be constrained in the number of homes that are available and open for ministry. My prayer is that we will have hundreds of open homes in our congregation that will be centers for ministry and caring.

### **(d) The importance of women**

Who makes the home? Who gives aid to strangers, counsels the broken-hearted, creates shelters for the poor, and prays for the redemption of this land? There is no doubt in my mind that it is the women among us. This is why we would like to see more and more women set aside so that they are free to minister full-time in this regard.

What about retirement? you ask. My answer is that we must never seek to retire from this school of life. Perhaps you have heard the story of the three theologians who were debating when life begins. One said life begins at birth, and the second said no, life begins at conception. The third answered, "You're both wrong. Life begins when the kids leave home and the dog dies!" This third viewpoint seems to be the prevalent one today. People can't wait to retire so they can begin to "live." Just when they have the most to offer, they forsake all the natural relationships they have built over a lifetime and join up with a bunch of old fogies who have nothing better to do than gossip over a game of bridge or lie about their golf scores. How can we retire and insulate ourselves from the world when we are liable to wake up in the morning and find a body on our doorstep? May God grant that we will never cease building homes that will be a refuge for the alien and the stranger, for the downtrodden and the downcast, to His glory. Amen.

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Catalog No. 891

1 Timothy 5:17-25

Eleventh Message

Brian Morgan

July 26, 1992

# KEEPING LEADERS IN THEIR PLACE

*SERIES: HOW TO RESTORE A CHURCH*

Next month will mark the 20th anniversary of the beginning of my formal studies at this church. I attended Stanford University, hoping to become a stockbroker, but I discovered that my appetite for the Scriptures was keener than my appetite for economics. After I graduated, I decided I wanted to intern at Peninsula Bible Church for two years. Emily and I loaded up a truck in Los Angeles, and with all our possessions (and little money), moved to the Bay Area. As we were leaving, my father said to me, "If you want to become a pastor, why don't you go to an accredited seminary?" I was unable to put my answer into words then, but my heart was saying I didn't want a credential; what I wanted was to be around godly men.

As a college student, I was invited to become an advisor to the Board of Elders of PBC. Sitting in that circle was an unforgettable experience for me. At the age of 19, I was interacting with men like Bob Roe, Bob Smith, Ray Stedman, Dave Roper, Dale Lazier, John Edrington and others. I was awestruck by these men. On the night of the first meeting I attended, I was particularly impressed afterwards as I watched one of the brothers approach another brother and ask, "Is there something between us in our relationship? If there is, I want to set it right." That had quite an impact on me, and I began to discover the true definition of the church. The church is not a organization; it is a family where purity is more important than activity.

If you were to ask me today, twenty years later, what has been the greatest asset of my spiritual education, I would say that it has not been learning Greek or Hebrew, or indeed anything I've attained in the classroom, or my travels; it is the wisdom I have gained being around this godly circle of men all those years. I still find it difficult to describe my feelings as I attend a meeting of elders. These men are truly servants. No one has an agenda, no one is in a hurry. Our sole task is to find the mind Christ for the lives of a few people. As a church, we have failed in many areas, but in this regard, God in his grace has kept us on track.

We will be looking at this theme of eldership this morning in our studies in the apostle Paul's first letter to Timothy. In this text, the apostle directs Timothy on how as a leader he should care for the elders of the church in Ephesus. Elders are like the fathers of families: they have certain needs, four of which Paul details here. If Timothy responds to them, he will keep leaders in their proper place.

We find the first of these needs in 5:17-18.

## I. Honoring Elders (5:17-18)

**Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who word hard at preaching [lit. "in word"] and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." (NASB)**

### (a) The definition of "double honor"

Elders are to honored like fathers. In the home, children should grant honor to their fathers by obeying their teaching and by providing for them in their old age. Parents share social weight in the community when their children are seen to be obeying their godly teaching. In the same way, elders are honored in the church as the congregation responds and obeys their teaching of the great doctrines of Christ. Furthermore, says Paul, elders who meet certain qualifications are worthy

of "double honor," of being set aside to be supported financially so that they have the freedom to carry out their divinely appointed tasks.

### (b) Who is worthy of double honor?

Paul gives three qualifications for elders (whom we would call full-time pastors) who are deemed to be worthy of double honor. These are: "excellent oversight, especially those working hard at preaching ("in word") and teaching."

First, elders must give excellent oversight: they must be diligent and faithful in caring for the flock; and they must have a deep love for the flock. This protects the body from someone who is a mere spiritual recluse. Shepherds must care for and keep in close touch with people. And the best shepherds, like Jesus, weep over their flock.

Secondly, elders must labor hard at preaching (lit. "in word"). Those who are set aside full-time must have more than a heart to care for people; they must have something to feed them with. Feeding the flock, of course, is the primary task of elders. Good shepherds work hard "in word." They become students of the scriptures, working hard in the process. They develop disciplined study habits, knowing if they are to be effective shepherds they can't depend solely on spontaneous insights to feed the flock. Teaching demands careful preparation. The elder is not a short order cook; he is master chef.

If working hard at studying the Scriptures was a requirement in first century, how much more important is hard work for Bible teachers today, twenty centuries removed from that first century world. Believers back then were well aware of the philosophical presuppositions of the Scriptures. We do not have the Hebrew frame of reference that governed the thinking of the Old Testament and informed the New Testament, as they had. Thus it is our task to recover the meaning that the text had to its original hearers, taking care to not impose our own presuppositions and prejudices. This is hard work! So a pastor cannot be a mere enthusiast; he must be a hard-working student of the Scriptures.

Studying does not come naturally to me. I find I am easily distracted. While reading a book might do great things for me spiritually, reading is not my natural bent. I would much rather talk on the phone, do yard work, play with the children, whatever. It requires all my strength and effort to study, although reading and studying have blessed me tremendously through the years. I have had to develop study methods, using external helps in order to grow spiritually. All of our preaching pastors use this method of studying texts to be preached a year ahead of time. Then we work through the material with small groups of people, sharing, praying, gathering insights, and working out the problems with the text before we ever preach from the platform.

Thirdly, Paul says an elder must be able to teach. If his goal is preparing food for his flock, he can't afford to spend all his time in the kitchen looking at recipes. He must prepare and serve meals. And he can't be a distant academic, living in his ivory tower all week long. I like John Stott's definition of the overly academic pastor: "six days of the week invisible, and one day of the week incomprehensible!" A pastor must draw his mind and heart together in diligent labor, with the goal of feeding the sheep a meal. But it has to be a nourishing meal. It can't be

something that flies above their heads. On this point, Spurgeon commented, “Jesus said, ‘Feed my sheep,’ not my giraffes.” Yoking his heart and his mind together, it is the job of the teacher to take the stuff of the ancient world and make it understandable and relevant to his modern world.

John Wesley and George Whitefield came from vastly different backgrounds. Wesley grew up in the academic world, while Whitefield grew up fatherless, living in a tavern. Both, however, had the same deep hunger for the Word of God, and both were excellent students. Wesley, the academic, returned to England in a state of dejection following his ministry in Georgia, his work a failure. As his boat was entering the harbor, another boat with Whitefield on board, was setting sail for America. Whitefield’s ministry in this country, as we know, began the Great Awakening. Having been brought up in a tavern, he saw the real world first hand. This, together with his experience in the theatre, enabled him to present the Scriptures with relevance and clarity, with the result that thousands came to Christ during his preaching ministry in this country.

### (c) The rationale for honor

“You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,” says Paul. The oxen which labor on the threshing floor, providing flour for food, themselves need to be fed and cared for. We would not think much of a master who took the fruits of his oxen’s labor and returned thanks by starving them. Commenting on Paul’s use of this same phrase in 1 Cor 9:9, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.” God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sakes?”, Martin Luther responded in his typical no-nonsense, earthy way, “Well, it obvious he is talking about us, for oxen can’t read.” The point the apostle is making is that the laborer has a right to share in what he produces.

“The laborer is worthy of his wages,” says Paul. This is common sense, isn’t it? Whenever we receive a service or product in the community, we ought to pay for it. It is wrong to expect something for free. Yet this is common in Christian circles—proving that we don’t really value the service we have been provided. How much do you value your soul? To God, it was worth the life of his only Son. He paid it all. What value do you place on it, and what expense will you go to to care for it?

Thus the early church should choose their full-time pastors from among those leaders who were already doing the work of elders. And they should not be mere enthusiasts, or irrelevant academics. Elders set aside “full-time” should be caring, passionate men with minds and hearts on fire for the Word of Christ and the people of Christ. Elders should be held in honor, says Paul, so the flock should honor them.

Secondly, elders need protection.

## II. The protection of Elders (5:19)

**Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses.**

Anyone who operates in the public sphere and is committed to the Word of God and the people of God will be subject to satanic attack. Satan’s greatest weapon against an elder is slander. In our nation, it seems he has thousands on his full-time payroll, serving this single objective.

A friend who works in Canada tells me that in that country it takes a very long time for someone to be placed on a pedestal, but once he has been elevated to a position of honor, he is kept there. In America, on the other hand, we are quick to raise people up on a pedestal, but then we immediately chop them off at the knees. You can make the cover of *Time* magazine one week and the following week you may very well be the lead story in the tabloids. On the one hand, we Americans

avoid character investigation, but at the other we relish character assassination.

It must not be so in the church. Once a man is honored as an elder he must be protected. Protect your brother; he has a right to his reputation. Assume he is innocent until he is proven guilty. The church should be a safe place where reputations are considered sacred. The commandment, “You shall not bear false witness,” is to be rigorously applied. If we were to treat life as a continual law court, we would eliminate half of our conversations. Don’t receive anyone’s testimony unless it is a first-hand witness; more than one witness is required, and the person who is being charged must be present to defend himself.

Jonathan Edwards, this country’s greatest theologian, fell victim to this kind of slander. He became convicted that it was wrong to partake of communion unless one was a Christian. To bring spiritual discipline in his congregation, he barred non-Christians, especially some young people who were living dissolute lives, from participating in communion. The traditionalists in the congregation made a great controversy about his position, and Edwards wrote a book in defense of his stand. But, for all his labors during 23 years of ministry in the church, Edwards was dismissed from his ministry. For months he had no income whatsoever. He was victimized by brutal character assassination. But he went out and began preaching to the Indians, those other outcasts, and he published the diary of that great preacher to the Indians, David Brainerd. In his farewell sermon to his congregation, Edwards said the following:

It was three and twenty years, the 15th day of last February, since I have laboured in the work of the ministry in the relation of a pastor to this church and congregation...I have spent the prime of my life and strength in labours for your eternal welfare. You are my witnesses that what strength I have had I have not neglected in idleness, nor laid out in prosecuting worldly schemes, and managing temporal affairs, for the advancement of my outward estate and aggrandizing myself and family; but have given myself to the work of the ministry, labouring in it night and day, rising early and applying myself to this great business to which Christ appointed me...

After I read that, I felt that what Jonathan Edwards needed was a board of elders to protect him. If elders are to be honored and given a platform to serve, they also need protection to keep them in their rightful place.

## III. The discipline of Elders (5:19-21)

### (a) The basis for discipline (5:19-20)

**Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful (of sinning).**

If the evidence against an elder is slight, protect him, says Paul, but if the evidence is weighty, then act publicly and decisively. The elders should act a) on the basis of ongoing sin; b) on the evidence of two or three witnesses; and c) in order that the rest may fear God. Just because a man holds an office in the church does not mean he ceases to be a brother. He is vulnerable to sin just like anyone else; he may need to have his feet washed on occasion. This, of course, assumes that the Matthew 18 process has already been carried out. Discipline is something that goes on all the time, for all the members of the church family. Leaders are not immune from sin, nor must they be regarded as being immune from the need for correction.

The apostle goes on to say that there is a threat to this process, however.

**(b) The threat to discipline: Partiality (5:21)**

**I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a (spirit of) partiality.**

Partiality is the great threat to discipline. We get our word “prejudice” (pre-judge) from the word “bias” here. Don’t discriminate, Paul warns Timothy, on the basis of prejudging the situation. He should hear both sides, and be methodical. And do not be “partial.” This is the word for “natural inclinations,” taking the easy way out. (The noun is the word for “easy chair.”) Don’t let initial suspicions or slanderous reports rule you, and don’t let your natural inclinations or friendship bias your investigation. If Timothy was fearful of men, he should remember that he was standing for God as Judge, and his Son, in the presence of angels.

Years ago, I was shocked to hear an elder investigating on the telephone another brother. I was a friend of this individual, and I was biased. But, following the investigation, discipline was carried out, without fear or partiality. Healing was effected, and the rest of the congregation were made fearful of sinning. I am happy to say that today this brother is fully restored.

There is a danger in the church that when people are honored with an office, that may perhaps tempt them to become removed from the rest of the congregation. The office becomes institutionalized, leaders become caught up in the pomp and circumstance, and they begin to think too highly of themselves and their authority; they become unapproachable, and their pride opens them up all kinds of evil. Remember the difference between King David and King Solomon. David, the messianic king, reigned from a cave in the wilderness, surrounded by a group of recluses. Solomon, by contrast, built up a royal class during his reign and the monarchy became institutionalized. The result was that the gap between the poor and downtrodden and the rich and famous became greater and greater. Before long, the poor began to be oppressed to pay for the homes and estates of the rich. Idolatry, licentiousness and child sacrifice soon followed because the ruling classes abused their power and saw themselves as lording it over the common people. This was the situation in Israel for 500 years, all because of this separation between the people and their leaders.

Leaders, by virtue of their office, must never regard themselves as anything more than mere brothers. They must always be subject and accountable to one another. This is why we evaluate someone on our staff or board of elders each month—his marriage, his spiritual life, and his ministry. We admit that we are all weak, and we all need the help of our brothers in order to remain pure.

Leaders, therefore, need to be honored with a place to rule; they must be protected in that place; but not idolized in their office.

**III. The selection of new Elders (5:22-25)**

**Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thus share (in) the sins of others; keep yourself pure from sin. No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after. Likewise also, deed that are good are quite evident, and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed.**

**(a) The command: “Don’t be in a hurry!”**

If Timothy were to submit to these priorities, to the Word of God and to the building up of the family of God, the work in Ephesus would grow, and there would be increasing demands upon his leadership. Then the pressure would come to appoint new elders to meet the pressing needs of the congregation. Furthermore, the church in Ephesus faced increasing pressure due to the situation with the false teachers

who were playing on the weaker women within the flock. Paul’s counsel to Timothy, however, is utterly un-American: “Wait!” says the apostle. The popular song a few years ago said, “Don’t worry. Be happy.” Here the apostle’s advice is, “Don’t hurry. Be happy.” Despite all the problems inherent in a burgeoning congregation, the best counsel was, “Wait.”

Why did Paul respond this way?

**(b) Because of the implication of “Laying on of hands”**

Laying on of hands is more than dispensing warm bodies to cover the bases; it is tantamount to full identification. When elders lay hands on someone, they are saying, “This one is my brother, my fellow elder. You can trust him: his integrity, his home, his work, his teaching, his oversight.” A few months ago, Dave Roper advised us to not push in this regard. If you do so, he said, you may end up giving birth to an Ishmael, and then you will have to live with him. Isn’t it better to wait a little longer?

**(c) Purity is more important than size**

A pure family is better than a large family. For three or four years, this church had only four elders. You will never know all that went on during that time, but they refused to rush to appoint new elders. They quietly worked through some critical issues and put things in order. Now the four have become eight. It’s still not enough, but a pure family is much more important than a large family.

And spiritual purity is more weighty than physical purity. This is why Paul includes these words, “No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.” It may have been because of the heavy responsibility of his office and his desire to be zealous for purity (especially in lieu of the impure culture of Ephesus), that Timothy gave up the custom of drinking wine with meals. But he was paying a high physical price for this, due to the impurity in the water supply in Ephesus. Paul responds by recommending the freedom of moderation, saying that spiritual purity (i.e. whom he lays hands on) is far more important with elders than what they eat or drink. Being too rigid in his asceticism could be dangerous to his health.

**(d) The benefits of waiting**

Paul concludes, “The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after. Likewise deeds that are good are quite evident, and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed.” A man’s life is like a garden. Every thought he sows, he sows in secret. No one but himself has access to it, and no interviewing process is guaranteed to reveal it. But in time the thought will become visible. It is sown as a thought, but it gives birth to an action. And even if the action is kept secret, when it is sown, it gives birth to a habit. And it is hard to hide or disguise a habit. Then, when habits are sown, they come up as character. And when character is sown, what comes up is a destiny. Thus Timothy should use time to his advantage. If the man was a sinner, and it had been kept secret, in time, when the seeds had germinated, that would become known. What harm had been done meanwhile in waiting? But if such a man was appointed as an elder, he would destroy the congregation. On the other hand, if a man was truly good, with good habits, yet his deeds had been largely unrecognized by the congregation (perhaps from lack of appreciation), what harm would waiting do? If you keep a good man hidden in secret, it won’t do him any harm. He can keep performing secret disciplines and good deeds; everyone benefits, and it will eventually become known.

I’m sure the apostle Paul regarded himself in this light. Saul, the first king of Israel, after whom he had been named, was a very charismatic and successful man, but he had no faith, no purity of spirit, no obedience. He ended his life as a maniac, trying to destroy the true Messiah. Paul, as Saul, began life as a maniac, killing and persecuting Christians. Following his conversion, no one would accept his testimony, and God

sent him home for 14 years. There, in secret, in the wilderness, God prepared him for ministry. Finally, in Antioch, Paul was recognized, and his great work in the church began at last.

So in this text we discover that elders need four things: the freedom that honor brings; the love that protection brings; the humility that discipline brings; and the patience that waiting brings. All of these work together so that when an elder takes office, he does so without pride. This is how leaders are kept in their place.

Of all the texts we have studied so far in this letter, this one, I feel, brings the strongest indictment against the modern church.

#### IV. An indictment on the modern church

##### (a) We have set aside the priority of the Word

The OT prophets foretold a day when everyone would prophesy by means of the Spirit, and the Word of God would cover the earth. What the church needs today is not more programs, not more marketing strategies, but the Word of God, taught by leaders who are impeccable in character and seasoned in life.

##### (b) We have compromised purity for growth

Growth seems to be the chief concern of the church in America. The greater the number of full-time workers, the greater the advance of the Kingdom, we are told. So we spend more and more money training full-time workers, with church growth as the object. But Paul says it is purity, not activity, that should be the measuring rod. Don't be in a hurry! Need should not determine ordination. Setting someone aside too early can be hazardous to his own spiritual health, and the spiritual health of the congregation.

##### (c) We have short-circuited God's school for leaders

If a man wants to be a pastor today, we set him aside to study in an academic institution; then, when he graduates, to gain experience he practices his gift on the congregation that hired him. But here in this letter we see that the process of a man living a normal life in the world of work and home, and exercising his gifts at his own expense, in the context of a local church family, is the proper way to leadership in the church. The beauty of this scheme of things is that it takes no artificial props or programs to keep it running. When such a man's record has been established, and he has gained a reputation in the community as a godly man, at a certain point the transition to his entering the full-time ministry becomes easy. It is much better to grant him academic training after his gift and character have already been demonstrated.

Twenty years ago, my father asked me, "If you want to be a pastor, why don't you go to seminary?" As I look back now on those years, I would have to say that even in my fondest dreams I never realized the full extent of the gifts that the elders of PBC would share with me. I have been granted honor—more honor, in fact, than this text dictates. When I finished my internship I wanted to go to seminary, but the elders asked me to remain on as a pastor and they would pay for my seminary education. I wanted to learn languages, so they brought a tutor to me. I wanted to learn about missions, so we went overseas as a staff—to Nigeria, Australia, Indonesia, and Romania, traveling with men like Ray Stedman and David Roper. I have found a place of protection, where leaders have guarded my reputation from false attack. They assume the best about people and do their best to promote them. I have found a place of discipline, and my feet have been washed on many occasions. And I am learning patience. I tend to be impulsive, and I want to put people forward too quickly, but my elders smile and say, wait, reminding me once more that a pure church is better than a large church.

I would like to close with a poem of appreciation to these elders who have been so faithful to me over these past twenty years.

Could I have an education, O Lord?  
Yes, it was mine, but this was no lecture,  
It was men! the finest in the land,  
Who wanted but one thing, You!

Driven by one quest,  
They labored among themselves,  
Finding the One mind of the One Lord,  
By the One Spirit.  
But how is it possible? No two pots are alike!  
Ah, but there is but one treasure.  
As He broke each pot,  
The light was the same, pure and radiant.

No program was sacred,  
They wanted the lead sail,  
Where the winds track in unknown waters,  
Longing for life, not fame.

So they went everywhere,  
Journeying along the Appian highways,  
Into the back roads of foreign lands,  
Discovering those precious gems,  
The eunuchs of Ethiopia.

With these simple men,  
I would carry my pack,  
Traveling in the joy of harmony,  
Depositing your trust.

And what do You ask in return?  
Is there any contribution I can make?  
I am so weak, so flawed,  
So stained with selfishness.

You ask me to teach, a joy not a burden;  
Shepherd the 70, but the 12 are better than I;  
Train the 12, but what is that?  
To be melted together in their love.

I am not like the saints of past,  
Calvin, MacDonald, Whitefield,  
and your amazing Edwards.  
They labored at great cost,  
And with less produced much more.

For such grace and so little task,  
I feel I will stand alone in heaven.  
In heaven, yes, by your blood,  
But alone—so far behind.

Those you gave no privilege  
no gifts,  
no money,  
no friends,  
no glory.

Like those simple ones in Romania  
Who stood unflinching under your cross,  
Their bodies buried under flames of ridicule,  
Crying, "Yahweh Echad!" (The Lord is One!)  
To you be the glory,  
Don't waste my life, O Lord.

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1 Timothy 6:3-16

Twelfth Message

Brian Morgan

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# STILLING THE STORMS OF DISCONTENT

*SERIES: HOW TO RESTORE A CHURCH*

Watching the Olympic Games on television this past week, I have been amazed at the dedication and level of skill of the athletes. What incredible effort they put forth to achieve their moment of glory! I have been particularly impressed by the dedication of our women gymnasts. Out of 38,000 gymnasts in the country, only six were chosen to compete in Barcelona. I couldn't help but notice, however, at least early in the week, the fact that hardly any of the gymnasts were smiling, even though most of them were scoring very high marks (many over 9.9). There seemed to be a lack of joy among them. Even the young Russian woman who won the all-around gold medal stood stoically, unsmiling on the awards platform. Then we learned that following the last Olympics in Seoul, a Russian gymnastics coach committed suicide because the girl he coached failed to win the gold medal, winning only a silver. The media doesn't help, either. They too have become a force for discontent, with their carping, negative criticism of the athletes' performances.

A spirit of discontent rests upon society, it seems. How destructive this is to the human spirit! The apostle Paul, writing to Timothy in the city of Ephesus in the first century, says that this spirit of discontent is a key tactic of the devil to destroy a church, a home or a workplace. Satan is forever seeking to infiltrate churches in the guise of false teachers who plant seeds of discontent among the congregation. When these seeds take root, they choke out all the love and harmony in the family, turning its members one against another, until the church loses all its influence for good upon society.

This text from chapter 6 of 1 Timothy to which we come today is third instance where Paul addresses the problem of false teachers in the church. This was the main reason he sent Timothy to Ephesus in the first place, and the main reason behind his writing this letter—to deal with this troublesome issue of false teachers. He sent Timothy, not to found a church, but to restore the church that was already there, to still the storms of discontent which had begun to blow around this false teaching, and to restore in its place, love among the brethren.

Paul lays out three-step plan of attack for Timothy in handling this problem of discontent: how to make a proper diagnosis; how to adopt a right plan of action; and how to stay motivated to the end.

## I. Getting a proper diagnosis (6:3-10)

### (a) Recognizing false teaching (6:3)

**If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, but he has morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. (6:3-5 NASB)**

Timothy would recognize false teaching by using a two-fold test: what is its source, and what is its effect. Any teaching that deviates from the "sound," healthy words of our Lord Jesus Christ can be classified as false teaching.

First, with regard to its source. The goal of teaching is not to be original, but to be faithful to the text. Teachers are stewards whose task is to pass along what has already been entrusted to them—the very words of Christ and his apostles. Timothy should feed the people on the pure wine of the scriptures, not the distilled, impure opinions of men. This was what would promote spiritual health among the congregation.

And second, with regard to its effect. What effect should teaching have? Godliness, is Paul's response. No matter which great doctrines are taught, creation, redemption, atonement, etc., their ultimate aim should be godliness, not speculation, fascination, or emotion. This should be the aim of all great preaching. The Scottish preacher, James Stewart, summed this up beautifully when he said that the focus of all preaching should be to

*Quicken the conscience by the holiness of God.*

*Feed the mind with the truth of God.*

*Purge the imagination by the beauty of God.*

*Devote the will to the purpose of God.*

### (b) Recognizing the point of issue: Their character (6:4a)

**(then) he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid (sick) interest in controversial questions and disputes about words...**

If Timothy recognized any deviation from these two goals, then he was dealing with a person of deviant character. False teaching is always a moral, not an intellectual issue. Behind the symptom of error lies a root of pride that has blinded the mind.

The outer manifestation of this pride is a sick (morbid) obsession in controversy and disputes (in contrast to the *healthy* words of 6:3). Paul's primary concern is not the content of these false teachers' doctrines; it is their character he sees as the greatest danger. False teaching is always symptomatic of a moral problem. Jesus was having a religious discussion with the woman at the well, in Samaria, a country that was riddled with false doctrine and false teaching, but he quickly got through to the heart of her problem. "Go call your husband," he told her. "I don't have a husband," she replied. "You're right," said Jesus, "and the man you're living with now is not your husband either." Before they could proceed with their conversation on religion, the moral issue had to be dealt with. Simon the silver-smith had a moral problem when he came to the apostle Peter in the story in Acts 8. But Peter quickly discerned the real issue. He said to Simon, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore

repent...for I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity” (Acts 8:20-23).

False teaching is extremely dangerous. If it is left unchecked it will become a cancer within the body.

**(c) Recognizing the dangers of false teaching (6:4b-5, 9-10)**

...but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. (6:4b-5)

A sick obsession with controversy and minutiae pits people against one another, with the result that an argumentative spirit, envy and pride invade the church. No longer is the church contending for the light of the gospel in the dark world. Instead the battle lines are drawn within the church as brother contends against brother. This leads to malicious talk, as people begin to harbor evil suspicions about each other. Finally, everyone becomes irritated and stirred up.

False teaching spreads like cancer until it finally affects the brain. Thus, the manifestation of a “depraved mind” is when these people think that “godliness is a means of gain.” Godliness equals profit, in other words. That is how sick these teachers are, says Paul. Their motivation to ministry is greed. Teaching philosophy as a “cloak for greed” was a common accusation in those times. And teaching religion as a “cloak for greed” would not be difficult in Ephesus, a city whose economy was financed by the tourists who bought the trinkets for the cult of Artemis. How easy it would be for this same spirit to infiltrate the church.

Following the turn of the first century, the problem of people wanting to enter the ministry for profit continued and had to be addressed with severe guidelines. In the *Didache*, a manual for church government, the counsel is given that it was all right to receive a prophet if one’s teaching conformed to sound doctrine, but if a teacher stayed on for more than three days, or if he asked for money, then he should be rejected.

We are living in an extremely greedy age. There is no doubt that this spirit has invaded the church also. Christians are asked to contribute to all kinds of fake charities, from fake orphanages overseas to false revivals at home. Here at PBC we have a strict policy with regard to people who charge fees to come and minister among us. We don’t permit them to teach from this platform! I believe we are generous to those who come to share the Word of God with us. We appreciate hearing from others who are not part of our body, but we make it our policy to not bring people here who ask for a set fee or an exorbitant fee. I make it my own policy to not charge fees either whenever I travel to speak. As a matter of fact, I usually bring a group of men with me who pay their own way so that they can minister with me.

If this spirit of teaching for profit is allowed to enter the church, a feeling of discontent and the love of riches takes over. The apostle says,

**But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some have wandered away from the faith, by longing for it and pierced themselves with many a pang. (6:9-10)**

The desire to become rich begins as a snare. The devil puts on an attractive and alluring front so as to trap victims. But soon this desire

for riches entangles like a root, and the entanglements go deep into the heart, choking out everything else, until it is so well established it can produce any kind of evil it wishes. “The love of money is a root of all sorts of evil.”

Then this entanglement with money breaks people apart like a flood, leading them to “harmful desires which plunge men into ruin.” This word was used of ships which were inundated with sea water until they broke apart under the heavy seas and plunged into the dark abyss. The “love of money” can be so heavy, its pull so powerful, that not even the ballast of faith can hold one’s ship together. This was what had happened in Ephesus with some who had forsaken their faith altogether.

Finally, the love of money can impale you like a spear, piercing you through with penetrating pains. Why would anyone want to get rich? Who would want to suffer that kind of intense pain? Riches are a snare, a trap of Satan to impale people on his spear. Judas betrayed the Lord for thirty pieces of silver, and he was pieced through with such pain from his action that his only escape was suicide, so he hanged himself. But even then the pressure of the pain was so intense that his belly burst and his bowels gushed out. The love of money, says Paul, is the root of all sorts of evil.

False teachers miss the prime quality that makes for effective teaching, says the apostle.

**(d) Recognizing the key ingredient missing in their lives: Contentment (6:6-8)**

But godliness is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing in the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. And if we have food and covering, (then) with these we shall be content.

The Greeks defined contentment as “a self-sufficiency that gives one an independence in life.” But here Paul defines contentment as Christ-sufficiency that frees one from the cares of the world. Writing in the 1600’s, in his book *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, Jeremiah Burroughs said: “Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.” Note that this is not referring to merely being outward quiet, but the whole frame of the inward soul is quiet before God.

This is the first thing that teaching doctrine is supposed to produce in life. The Bible begins with creation and ends with eschatology, and the implications of both are given by Job: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return.” During the short journey in between, God has promised to meet all our needs. Knowing this makes materialism irrelevant and greed irrational.

Paul would say if a person is not content, exhibiting that sweet inner spirit, then he should not be given a platform to speak in the church. This is why the apostle is far more concerned with the character of the false teachers than with their doctrine. If Timothy were to rush in and do battle with doctrine, he would only be pulled into the controversy and made to fight on their terms. This would destroy his own sense of contentment, his most precious possession.

Having made his diagnosis of the problem of false teachers, Paul goes on to lay out a plan for Timothy to respond, using the imagery of athletics, that of a runner, a wrestler and an archer.

## II. The right plan of attack (6:11-12)

### (a) Run the right race

**But you, O man of God, flee these things; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.**

Timothy's first concern should not be in doing battle with the false teachers, but in attending to his own character. "You (in contrast to all others)," says Paul, "are 'a man of God'."

"Man of God" was the OT title of honor for men like Moses and David. The term also was used of the two prophets, Elijah and Elisha, who stood out as God's spokesmen in a corrupt age. On one occasion, Elijah fled an arena of controversy (following his encounter with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel), and ran all the way to the land to Horeb, the mountain of God. He came to a cave (perhaps the same cave where Moses asked of God, "Show me Thy glory"), and it was there that he heard the still, quiet voice of God. Then he knew that God would do the work of his kingdom powerfully, through a remnant. The Lord was in control, so Elijah could endure, and be gentle.

We have just heard the news of the passing of Bob Smith, the last surviving member of the group of five men who founded Peninsula Bible Church more than forty years ago. Bob Smith was a great source of godly wisdom to me on many occasions. Once, when I was an intern at PBC, I was asked to speak at the funeral of a young man who was high on drugs and was struck and killed by a car driven by his friends. I had never spoken at a funeral before, and the very week of the funeral I was planning on a leaving on vacation with my wife. Needing advice, I went into Bob Smith's office and asked him what he thought I should do. He looked at me with those piercing blue eyes and said, "Brian, you are God's man! If you don't speak the truth, who will speak?" Then he shared with me his outline on how to do a funeral. Over twenty years, and many funerals, I have not deviated from the outline that Bob Smith gave me that day. There was a sense of despair at the funeral, but I got to raise high the banner of Jesus Christ and his gospel. This is Paul's advice to Timothy. When controversy flares, and when false teachers are preying on the flock, his role was to be what God had made him to be, a "man of God."

When winds of controversy begin blowing into our hearts, the best advice is to run, to flee to God before we are consumed. Let us not become caught in damaging controversies. If we do, we will begin acting like our enemy. The proverb says,

**For lack of wood the fire goes out,  
Without whispers, contention quiets down. (Prov 26:20)**

Run the right race, says Paul—run toward God.

And second,

### (b) Fight the right fight

**Fight the good fight of faith (6:12a)**

Christians must be willing to contend, to do battle, but over the things that are essential. Alexander Karelin is an immensely strong Graeco-Roman wrestler from Russia. He is so good at his sport that he picks up his opponents with a full-body lift, then he flips them upside-down, crashing them on their necks. One Romanian wrestler who has faced this man 13 times was interviewed on television. "I'm not going to contend over that," he said, "it's not worth it."

Much of the controversy and word battles that Christians engage in are not worth breaking the church's neck over! Recently someone gave me a book that is critical of a certain theological system. After reading it, I felt its spirit was wrong. While I agreed with the author's viewpoint, he was far too polemical and argumentative for my liking. I don't want the book in my library because it stirs up my soul against my brethren. What is worth going to battle over is the real fight, "the good fight of faith." Let us agonize over that, bringing people to faith, and then building them up in their faith.

There is a third thing.

### (c) Grasp the right goal

**take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses, (6:12b)**

The goal of the competitors in the Olympics is winning gold medals. To do so, these athletes are willing to go through the agony of training and strict diets, inflicting punishment and pain on their bodies. But here Paul holds out a transcendently better prize—eternal life itself, life incorruptible—and we don't have to wait for the future to receive it.

The figure Paul has in mind here is a wrestler. From this text, I think of Jacob's wrestling with God (Gen 32:22-32). Jacob wrestled with deceit all his life, but one night he found himself wrestling with the Life-giver himself. In order to prevail over Jacob, and in order to bless him, which was what Jacob wanted, the man had to dislocate Jacob's thigh. The secret to grasping eternal life, of course, is to give up. You can't have the blessing until you let go. Jacob had to learn to give up in order that he might be truly content. How difficult a lesson this is for all of us to learn!

So when controversy comes, the apostle's advice is, don't worry, be godly. The best defense is a good offense. Separate yourselves from controversy and run to God. Listen to the still, small voice, and then contend over the real issues that bring eternal life.

There is one thing left—how to remain motivated.

## III. Keeping motivated until the end (6:13-16)

**I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.**

Three things will serve to motivate Timothy: Christ's example, Christ's appearance, and Christ's glory.

### (a) The example of Christ

**Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate (6:13b)**

Timothy had made a good confession at his baptism. Jesus also made a good confession at the beginning, but he had completed the course, making a good confession before Pontius Pilate at the end. There was much controversy in Israel as Jesus made his way to Jerusalem for the final time, yet he did not waste one ounce of energy trying to infiltrate the Sanhedrin, lobby the Romans, or derail Judas.

His sole concern was to make a faithful confession, even during the mock trial to which he was subjected, until the end. Silent as a lamb being led to slaughter, Jesus entered into battle only to contend for the faith. He saved the life of the criminal; he cared for and made provision for his mother; he warned the mothers of Jerusalem about the impending disaster upon the city. Let us follow the example of Jesus who did not waste his time with controversy.

How did he do it? It was through the power of God who was with him, the God who gave him eternal life all through his terrible ordeal. Timothy's fight would never be as traumatic and difficult, but the same God was with him, as he will be with us too in our time of trial.

#### (b) The appearance of Christ

**that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time (6:14-15a)**

Jesus is coming back, says the apostle, and you will render an account to him. Did you grasp life indeed or were you derailed and distracted by controversy? Did you lose that gentle spirit and become combative and argumentative, winning all the word battles but losing the war for souls?

#### (c) The glory of Christ

**He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen. (6:15a-16)**

This benediction is "a gem from the devotional treasury of the Hellenistic synagogue which converts had naturalized in the Christian church" (Kelly). And this is not referring to a future glory; everything that Paul says about Christ is a present reality. Gordon Fee writes,

These terms have separate histories in the OT. *King of kings* was first used of the Babylonian and Persian emperors (Ezek. 26:7; Dan. 2:37; Ezra 7:12), but by the time of 2 Maccabees 13:4 is applied to God. Lord of lords was used in conjunction with "God of gods" to express God's absolute sovereignty over all other "deities" (Deut. 10:17; Ps. 136:2-3). The two terms had already been joined in Judaism in 1 Enoch 9:4; they are joined again as designations of Christ in Rev. 17:14 & 19:16. Here they emphasize God's total sovereignty over all powers, human and divine. (Gordon Fee, *1 Timothy*, NIBC)

As we contemplate this, our hearts will become quieted and we will be content. The disciples panicked during the storm on the Sea of Galilee, but Jesus stilled the winds, demonstrating that he was the Lord of the elements. We don't need more activists in the church; what we need is more of Jesus. He can still the storms that rage in our souls, and the storms of controversy that rage in the church. He alone possesses immortality. He alone is incorruptible, dwelling in unapproachable light. What an inheritance we have as Christians, for we too will share that glory with him on the great day.

The glory of the Barcelona Olympics burst forth when the archer shot his arrow over the Olympic torch and the flame illuminated the night sky. It was a magnificent sight, although it was a corruptible glory that would last but a few days. We remember the glory of the city of Sarajevo during the Winter Olympics a few years ago. Where is that glory today? Now the winds of greed and war have now turned that glory into blood and rubble. But it will not be so in God's city, the New Jerusalem, built through the blood of Christ, and illuminated by the light of the Spirit that burns brighter than any archer's arrow. When that city descends, the light from its flame will light up the entire city, against the darkened sky, and its glory will light up the entire earth forever and ever.

How can we remain motivated until that glorious day? By the example of Christ, the appearance of Christ, and the glory of Christ. What the church needs today is men and women of God who, like Moses, when all of Israel was in consternation at the foot of Mt. Sinai, separated himself to ascend to the mountain of God. There said to the Lord, "I pray Thee, show me Thy glory" (Exod 33:18).

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1 Timothy 6:17-19

Thirteenth Message

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# RESCUING THE RICH

*SERIES: HOW TO RESTORE A CHURCH*

In this final chapter of his first letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul warns Timothy about certain forces that Satan uses to destroy churches. In our last study Paul addressed the matter of false teachers: men of deviant character who sought to infiltrate the church with their false doctrine and sow devilish seeds of discontent among the congregation. The evidence that these seeds had germinated became apparent when people began to assume that godliness was a means of gain. Greed began to motivate people to ministry, doing great damage to their souls in the process.

The church in Ephesus, a very wealthy city, was a prime target for such an attack. The greed of idolatry had financed the building of the Temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The temple not only made Ephesus the center of world tourism, but a chief center of investment banking, as temples also served as banks for the deposit of monies in those days. Paul's second admonition here in this chapter is that Timothy do everything in his power to prevent this desire to become rich from creeping into the church. This, of course, placed Timothy in somewhat of a dilemma: What about those who already were rich? It was a great tribute to the church in Ephesus that a number of the rich had come to Christ. The church might very well have been meeting in their homes of these rich Christians. The fact that they were in the church, however, did not absolve them from the need to be warned about the dangers of riches.

The three verses that we will look at today form a single sentence built around the word "riches." Here Paul uses this word four times in four different grammatical forms. First, it is used of "the rich," who form the subject; secondly, it is used as an object of pursuit: "uncertain riches"; third, it is used as an adverb describing God who gives "richly"; and finally it is used as a verb: "to be rich" (in good works). In these words, Timothy will learn how to rescue the rich from the snare of riches, that they might find a richer life and dispense true riches.

Paul begins with a reminder to the rich.

## I. Remind them of the dangers of riches (6:17-19)

**Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed. (NASB)**

Perhaps you remember the opening scene from the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, where the poverty-stricken Tevya prays, "Lord, it's no shame to be poor, but it's no great honor, either. Would it spoil some vast eternal plan if I had a small fortune?" Then he goes on to sing the song we all know so well, "If I Were A Rich Man." Paul

would respond, "Yes! It would spoil some vast eternal plan." Why? Because there is a tremendous cost to riches.

The apostle lists five dangers that riches lead to. First, riches tend to produce arrogance. He writes, "Command those who are rich... not to be conceited."

Second, riches can be deceptive. Rich people tend to rely on their riches for their future hope and security. But riches are very uncertain; they cannot guarantee an eternal return.

Third, riches can tempt people to isolate themselves from being personally involved in the lives of others, so Paul has to remind the rich to be rich in good works.

Fourth, the more people become rich, the more they tend toward hoarding and selfishness. Oftentimes the poor are more generous than the rich as they give freely out of their poverty.

And fifth, riches bring entanglements, not only in the acquiring of them, but in managing and protecting them. Rich people can miss out on what is truly valuable, and life becomes artificial.

I know of a family that fell victim to the dangerous cost of riches. They began with very humble beginnings. The mother was orphaned by the time she was 9 years old and she was adopted into an abusive home. Some years later she fled this home to marry a man who was very committed to his career. Following World War II, they bought a little home and there they raised three daughters. There was a simplicity about their lives in those days. They found joy in the simple things. They enjoyed their cocker spaniel, horseback riding, and music (the mother was a concert cellist). Both husband and wife were tenacious workers, determined that their children would not have to endure the things they endured. The husband worked hard to make ends meet, so much so that they didn't take a vacation for the first 20 years of their marriage. They saved enough to buy a bigger home, with a swimming pool. Ten years later they bought an even bigger home. Now, everyone had their own bedrooms and their own cars. They had a membership in an exclusive country club, shopped in the best stores in Beverly Hills, and were able to travel all over the world. They offered their girls the best opportunities for education and travel.

But, with the acquisition of wealth, they lost the closeness and simplicity they once enjoyed. Each member of the family became more independent and isolated. They never took family vacations together (their last one was in 1957, when their youngest child was 6). Soon they began to take separate vacations. Then the husband and wife began to take separate vacations. The children were never encouraged to cultivate friendships with the extended family of aunts and uncles and cousins. In their isolation the daughters began to experience difficulties. One became pregnant at 15, and almost died when she had an abortion. The mother had a nervous breakdown. Another daughter got married at 22 but, tragically, the marriage lasted only 16 days; then she had a nervous breakdown. Feeling

unloved, the other daughter began to experiment with drugs. She fled the home to marry a writer, divorced him, and went back to live at home. She married again, but her marriage lasted only 16 days. Her husband was an alcoholic, and he died at the age of 38. Now the couple are in their old age, living in the midst of their wealth. They have scarcely any friendships. Two of their girls remain unmarried and are still financially dependent on their parents. In accumulating his wealth, the father lost much of it in unwise investments. The hope that riches once promised was a vain hope that failed to deliver. Wealth was a deceitful idol. Instead of fulfilling their dreams in life, riches led them down a dead-end street named loneliness.

The family I am speaking of was my own.

Riches, warns the apostle, can bring arrogance, hopelessness, loneliness, selfishness, and emptiness.

Yet God in his grace loves to pull off rescue operations for the rich. So in these three verses Paul tells Timothy how to rescue the rich from these dangers and make them useful for the Kingdom of God. Each verse, as we will see, has an antidote.

## I. Rebuke their false security (6:17)

**Instruct those who are *rich* in this present world not to be conceited nor to fix their hope on the *uncertainty of riches*, but on God, who *richly* supplies us with all things to enjoy.**

### (a) Rebuke their arrogance

It is easy for the rich to become “conceited”—to think, or cherish, exalted thoughts about themselves. The OT law warns about this. Moses admonished the Israelites concerning the rich land they would be given as a gift from God,

**“Beware lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; lest, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them...then your heart becomes proud, and you forget the Lord your God...and you say in your heart, ‘My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.’” (Deut 8:11-12, 14, 17)**

Therein lies the dangers of riches. The proverb says, “Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him” (Prov 26:12). And in Proverbs, of course, as we know, there is no hope for a fool.

Righteous men throughout Scripture were wary of riches. Agur, the son of Jakeh, had quite a different prayer to God than Tevya:

**Two things I asked of Thee,  
Do not refuse me before I die:  
Keep deception and lies far from me,  
Give me neither poverty nor riches;  
Feed me with the food that is my portion,  
Lest I be full and deny Thee and say, “Who is the Lord?”  
Or lest I be in want and steal,  
And profane the name of My God. (Prov 30:7-9)**

Rebuke the arrogance of the rich, says Paul.

There is a second thing.

### (b) Redirect their hope

Admonish the rich, he says, “not to fix their hope on uncertain riches.” Most people today would cry, “I have a future,” if they won the California lottery, but the proverb says,

**The wealth of the rich is their fortified city.**

**They imagine it an unscalable wall. (Prov 18:21; 23:4-5)**

Some years ago I stood in front of the palace of the Romanian dictator Ceaucescu. This man robbed his country to build this palace, which is five times bigger than the Palace of Versailles. Then my friend Arthur Halliday opened up the Old Testament and read,

**“Though you build your houses of well hewn stone,**

**Yet you shall not live in them...**

**because you turn aside the poor at the gate.” (Amos 5:11-12)**

Not very long afterwards, on Christmas Day, that anti-Christ, met Christ, his Judge, and he never lived in his house of well hewn stone.

Prophets like Amos tried to warn the rulers that there was coming a new world order—the one that Jesus inaugurated with his death and resurrection. This world of flesh is an illusion. Thus Daniel could warn Nebuchadnezzar that his world was an illusion, while the prophet himself was having dreams of a coming Messiah who would create this new world order.

Paul warns the rich of this present age of the same thing. Thus he tells them to fix their hope on God who richly supplies things for our enjoyment. Life is a gift, says the apostle.

When I studied in Italy as a college student, I went to Greece for 16 days once on a field trip. My friends and I chose the island of Mykonos for our adventure. In Athens we bought old army backpacks and filled them with provisions—Spam and canned peas and other “heavy” luxuries to provide for us in what we thought would be a wilderness experience. We landed on Mykonos and hiked three miles to the other side of the island, laboring with our heavy backpacks all the way in the summer heat. When we got to our destination, we were amazed to find all our friends sitting outside a harbor restaurant and eating souvlakia (grilled lamb and vegetables on a skewer), for about 15 cents apiece. So much for our canned Spam! But this is how many of us live life, isn't it? We bring along our canned Spam, trusting that to sustain us, when God has already gone before us and prepared a party.

This is the theology of the Bible from the Garden of Eden onwards. Adam's first day on the earth was not a work day, it was a sabbath, a day for a party. God took him on a tour of the garden and gave him everything as a gift to enjoy. As the OT unfolds, man was asleep during every covenant that God made with him. Everything was a gift from God. The first public appearance of Jesus was at a wedding where he turned water into wine—not just any wine, but the best. I calculate that he probably gave that couple a \$4,000 gift. What was he declaring by this? He was saying that he was not on earth to take but to give life on a higher level than it had ever been experienced before. And he even wants sinners to enjoy this party; that is why we have the story of the prodigal son. The Father is extremely generous, and anxious to spend his joy on sinners. But most people won't take life as a gift, and this grieves the Father's heart. How true are the words of Henry David Thoreau, “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.”

This is why Paul tells Timothy to encourage the rich to redirect their hope from riches to the God who richly gives us all things to enjoy.

This brings us to the apostle's second antidote for the rich.

### III. Retrain them in their investments (6:18)

**Instruct them to do good, to be *rich* in good works, to be generous and ready to share...**

#### (a) Invest your time in people

The rich make rationalizations for their pursuit of money. They say they are making money so that they can leave something to their family, or to the church, whomever. But Paul says that by itself, money is a very poor gift. What is money compared to the best gift you can give, which is yourself and your time? What is the good of fathers working until they die so that they can leave their children houses, furniture and jewelry, but no memories? Life itself is the sweetest gift of all. The best investment I have made all year is a badminton set. I have spent many happy evenings lately playing badminton with my middle daughter.

This text may suggest that the best ministries are not capital-intensive, but labor-intensive. You remember the great fire that swept the hills of Oakland last year. How would you feel if the insurance company that insured your home built you a brand new, completely decorated home; or if, by comparison, you were an Amish family whose home burned down, and in the morning you saw scores of workers coming to rebuild your home. Then the men worked all day while the women cooked wonderful meals, and you saw your home rebuilt in a day. The home that was built by the insurance company had no memories, but the home built by your friends was full of memories. Which would you prefer? The capital-intensive method or the labor-intensive method? When it comes to good works, the rich are poor. Paul tells Timothy to help the rich with the joy of getting down and dirty, as we say, to enjoy the simplicity of life.

In this respect, I'm very impressed with former President Jimmy Carter. He is not going around using his role as an ex-President to enrich himself. Instead he is using his title to help launch Habitat for Humanity, a ministry of building homes for the poor. He and his wife even spend their vacations building homes, working alongside the poor. His next project is working with sexually abused girls in Atlanta. As a former governor of the state of Georgia, he feels he has got to play a part in solving some of these extremely difficult problems.

#### (b) Invest your money in people

Next, says Paul, "Be generous, ready to share" Someone asked me recently about tithing. He said that he saw nothing of this in the New Testament, so I shared with him the theology of tithing from the OT. The first gift in the Bible was the gift of Abel, who gave to God the first and the best of everything he possessed. He was saying to God, in effect, that everything was his to begin with, and his gift was a symbol of that. Cain, on the other hand, gave "some" of his possessions, not the firstfruits, to God. Cain determined to take care of his own needs first, then he gave God what amounted to a tip. But this was a stench in God's nostrils. In Israel, the tithe (the first tenth) symbolized that everything belonged to God. With the coming of Jesus, however, no longer is there any mention of the 10 per cent. It was because Jesus had created a whole new world order. He lived in poverty and gave everything to God, and though poor he made many rich.

Nature teaches this too. Last fall, I planted six rose bushes in my yard. I like to go out in the morning and pick a rose and place it my Emily's plate before I make breakfast. A couple of weeks ago, when one of my daughters suffered a severe disappointment, I picked six roses and placed them on her bed with a note saying, "Dad loves

you." Next evening a woman who lives near us came to our home in tears over something she was going through. I went out and picked every last rose on my rose bushes and gave them to her. I had no difficulty giving every last rose away. But two days later I went out and discovered that 44 new rose buds had sprung up! It is the same with this new world order that Jesus has inaugurated. Give, and be generous, because you can't out-give God. The more "roses" you harvest for the benefit of others the more life you receive.

Remind the rich of the dangers of their riches, says Paul. Rebuke them of their pride, and retrain them in their investments so that they will begin to invest themselves in people.

What will be the result if the rich begin to follow these steps?

### IV. Secure for them everlasting returns (6:19)

**storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.**

#### (a) Secure them a future

There are two questions you need to ask whenever you want to make an investment: 1) what is its present yield? and 2) what is the ultimate future return? Usually, you have to play one against the other. A good future return usually demands sacrificing present yield. Paul says the rich sacrifice their life for future return, but the tragedy is that in so doing they not only lose out in the present, they have no future either.

Solomon, the fabulously wealthy king of Israel, would agree. Here is what he wrote in the book of Ecclesiastes:

**There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being guarded by their owner to his hurt. When those riches were lost through a bad investment and he had fathered a son, then there was nothing to support him. As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand. And this also is a grievous evil—exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So, what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind? Throughout his life he also eats in darkness with great vexation, sickness and anger. (Ecc 5:13-17)**

When you invest your time and money in the kingdom of God, however, you get both—a secure future and a present yield. And there no threat to your investment, so you can sleep at night.

Ecc 5:12 says,

**The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, But the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep.**

And the proverb says,

**A man's riches may ransom his life, But a poor man hears no threat. (Prov 13:18)**

The thief may enter a poor man's home, but what is he going to steal? When one of our pastors, Ron Ritchie, first moved to Half Moon Bay to settle in their little beach house, a policeman came knocking on their door one morning. He told Ron that he had come to mark all the valuables in the home in case they were ever stolen. Ron, in his typically humorous fashion, called out to Anne Marie, "Get the dog!" There was a family that could sleep at night! They were investing in people, not in possessions.

What Paul really desires for the rich is that they might find true riches, and with them, life itself.

**(b) Grant them a joyous present return**

The great danger the wealthy face is that their lives will become utterly artificial. The apostle, however, wants to teach them to live at a higher level.

And what does this higher of level of life look like? Note the example of Jesus in the wilderness. He was tempted by the devil to make bread from stones. If indeed he was the new Moses, and if he was going to feed Israel, then he should be able to do that, insinuated the devil. The temptation was not to use his Messiahship to make food, but rather to feed himself through his office. But Jesus refused. He came to feed others, trusting that God would feed him. At the close of that incident in the wilderness, angels came to Jesus and fed him a meal of heavenly food.

The next scene where this theme occurs is in John 4, when Jesus taught the disciples about this heavenly food. They were hungry, and the Lord sent them into the city to buy food. While he was sitting by the well of Samaria, waiting for them to return, he was thirsty and longed for a drink of water. But, rather than taking a drink, he imparted a drink to an abused woman who came by to draw water, and she found a well of eternal life in her soul. She returned to her village and told all the men. Later, when the disciples returned with the food they had bought, Jesus told them, "I have food you know nothing about." And looking on the horizon, he pointed out the harvest of souls from the village coming to meet him, having heard the woman's testimony about him. Later these people fed all of the disciples a meal. Where would you rather eat? At the local hot dog stand, or at the home of people who prepare a meal with tears of appreciation for you?

I learned much in this respect in Romania. When I was getting ready to depart that country after my first visit there, all of our host families came bearing gifts for us (at 5 a.m., no less!). Although these dear people were living in poverty, they brought dolls for each of my daughters—and each doll cost the equivalent of a week's wages. If I could afford to buy the most beautiful doll in the world, from the most expensive store, nothing could match those gifts that were made to me that day. This is eternal life. If we will take hold of this life now, our hearts will become enlarged so that we will appreciate things more and more. Our souls will become content, and we will find ourselves dealing less and less with everything that is artificial. Those whom you have loved in this life will welcome you in heaven, and no one will ever take those riches away from you.

If the rich do not trust in their riches, but in God who richly gives all things, and if they become rich in good deeds by investing in people, they will secure a rich future.

So Christians will not pray the prayer of Tevya: "Would it spoil some vast eternal plan?/If I were a wealthy man?" Neither will we pray the prayer of Agur, who prayed that he be neither rich nor poor. We learn, with Jesus, that we can live in poverty and yet be spiritually rich, with a greater heart for God than we could ever have if we were rich in the things of this world. Does it not amaze you, as it does me, that God has rescued us from our riches so that we might have true riches? We could have gone on in our wealth—arrogant, headstrong, entangled, lonely, empty—and for us the proverb would have rang true that "it is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle." But, because all things are possible with God, he saved us, even the rich. To me this is the hallmark of his grace—that he rescued a rich man like me and trusted me with true riches.

I would like to close by reading a poem of appreciation to God for rescuing me from the uncertainty of riches.

Who am I, O Lord?  
It seems contrary to your ways.  
You take the poor and the meek,  
And place them to sit at nobles' feet.

But I was among the privileged, the only son  
Of a surgeon, the apple of his eye.  
Handed wealth, and station;  
Kept in a cocoon, protected by Thee.

Emerging from timidity, I knew only success.  
Academics, athletics, relationships,  
All mine.  
What is this, that You would choose me?

Even Thy call to the cross, was joy not pain.  
Not from darkness, but in thanksgiving for the light,  
Did I call out to Thee.  
Is it written this way in Thy Book?

May we all walk worthy of such grace, building and restoring his church in love. Amen.

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