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1 Timothy 1:8-17

Second Message

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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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