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1 Timothy 1:18–2:8

Third Message

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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.¹

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).