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

Ninth Message

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# 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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