

1Tim 23-08-13b

We are ready now to resume our study in 1st Timothy. We're looking at the situation in Ephesus, and it's unique in that we know quite a bit of the history of the church in this town. In Acts, we find the founding of the church by the Apostle Paul, the encouragement of the church, him returning at a later time to spend three and a half years teaching and exhorting.

He's two years in the school of Tyrannus. He sends Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia from there. They become familiar with Timothy and his association with the Apostle Paul.

And then Paul receives witness as he bypasses Ephesus to go to Jerusalem, and he calls the Ephesian elders, and we have that very famous scene that we've seen in chapter 20 of Acts. Now, after the end of Acts, Paul is going to be released from that two-year house arrest that is recorded by Luke at the end of Acts, and is going to basically have a fourth missionary journey. And we have to piece this together from sort of scattered and oblique references in the epistles to include Timothy.

But one of the things we find is that Paul is in fact going to return to Ephesus with Timothy. He's going to leave Timothy there, and he is going to travel on to Macedonia. And that is the reference that we have in 1 Timothy chapter 1. Now, we are not finished with what we know about the history of the church in Ephesus.

Turn with me to Revelation chapter 2. Revelation chapter 2. Does Timothy succeed in this mission that is given to him by the Apostle Paul to teach into the perversion, the mythology, the genealogies, the false teachings, the distractions from the gospel? The very first of the letters to the seven churches from the Lord Jesus Christ is to this same group. This is in the latter days when John is in Patmos. This is perhaps a decade or two after Timothy's pastoral witness there.

John the Apostle seems to have ended up in Ephesus as his residence in the later days of his life. And from exile in Patmos, John writes back to Ephesus where Paul ministered, Timothy ministered, and John the Apostle himself seems to have ministered. So to the angel, to the messenger.

The messenger is basically the pastor, the teacher there. To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, These things says he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. I know your works, your labor, your patience, and, catch this, that you cannot bear with those who are evil.

You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars. This is a great testimony to the effectiveness of Timothy's pastoral ministry given to him in charge by the Apostle Paul. What he did was effective.

Despite his youth, despite the hardships, despite the opposition, despite the proliferation of these false teachers, Timothy evidently did a good job and laid a foundation on which the Apostle John may have built. We only have church tradition to tell us that John was in Ephesus. But evidently Timothy carried out this charge from the Apostle Paul because the Ephesians have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them to be liars.

And you have persevered and have patience and have labored for my namesake and have not become weary. So what are the two things we know thus far about the later days of this very same Ephesian church? They are doctrinally sound, they can detect and repudiate error and false teaching, and they are working hard and laboring for Jesus' namesake. What they do, they do in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus said, and I think about this many times when I go to tune a piano, someone will offer me a cold bottle of water or a glass of water, and they're almost always believers, and I remind them that they'll get a blessing for giving a cup of cold water in the Lord's name to the least of these, my brethren, one of these little ones, and doing it in the Lord's name. They do what they do in the Lord's name. These are two wonderful qualities, to have the truth and hold fast to it and identify and reject error.

That's a wonderful thing. And to be doing what you do in the Lord's name, that's critical. That is so important.

And the Lord Jesus commends them for so doing. Verse four, nevertheless, what can be a pitfall despite having doctrinal purity and sound biblical understanding and living your life and doing your works in the name of the Lord Jesus? What else is there? Well, Jesus says, I have this against you. You have left your first love.

Triad of Christian virtues. Faith is the means. Hope is the motivation.

Love is the measure. Is my hope, is my faith bearing fruit, fruit of the spirit, fulfilling the one and others. I'm doing what I'm doing in the Lord's name, but you've left your first love.

What is the first love? Well, in context, Jesus says to these Ephesians, remember, therefore, from where you have fallen. This is a sobering exhortation. You can have your theology straight.

You can understand the word of God rightly. You can have the truth. You can be set free by that truth.

You can discern and reject error, and you can be doing what you do in the Lord's name. You're doing it in his name, but you have left your first love. This is not one another love.

Remember the cross. It's the vertical post that holds up the horizontal cross beam, right?

The first love is love for God. The first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.

The second command and the second love that sums up all the law and the prophets is to love your neighbor as yourself. So you can be doing your works in the Lord's name. You can be adhering to proper biblical understanding, and the Lord Jesus can have something against us.

Lost your first love. And it seems a bit nebulous. What does it mean to lose your first love? Should I have some sort of a passion or an emotion or a sort of a romantic level of emotion toward God? What does it mean to lose your first love? Well, we find it out from the remedy.

Remember from where you have fallen, change your mind, repent, and do the first works. So this love is expressed in works. God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope.

Work of faith, labor of love. Change your mind and do the first works. What you do, you do in the Lord's name, but you're not doing the first works.

So there is some work happening. You have labored for my name's sake, and you have not gotten tired in that. You're laboring for my name's sake, but change your mind and do the first works.

You've left your first love. First love, first works, change your mind, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place unless you change your mind, unless you repent. Repentance is metanoeo.

Meta is change, metamorphosis, change the morphos, change the form. Metanoeo is the noose, change your mind. This you have that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Whatever else we can determine about the Nicolaitans, they were in the wrong and the Ephesians rejected them and rejected their deeds. They've rejected evil deeds. They've rejected the deeds that the Lord Jesus hates that are practiced by the Nicolaitans.

Whatever a Nicolaitan is, Nikos, Nike, Victory, Laos people, sort of, you get the idea that these are the victory people. They've either victorious over people or they're doing things in the name of victory. Whatever it is, Jesus hates their works and the Ephesians hate them also.

So this is another commendation. So remember from where you have fallen. Again, it's a bit unnerving to hear that you can have your theology straight, you can be listening to Bible class and yet have fallen.

And by falling, you lose your first love and you're no longer doing the first works. So are these first in terms of chronology or first in terms of importance? I would argue that this is first in terms of importance. Your first love is focus and the centrality of and on God himself, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

How is it that Paul makes this terrible mistake of going to Jerusalem despite repeated exhortations, warnings, and instructions from God, the Holy Spirit? Who does Paul love at this point? He loves the Gentiles. He wants to vindicate the Gentiles in front of the Jews in Jerusalem. He wants to bring their offering.

He wants to vindicate the Gentile believers and in so doing, he's also vindicating himself and his commission and his ministry. He wants to be justified and appreciated and his commission from the Lord Jesus to be recognized by the Jews in Jerusalem. Paul began as a Pharisee.

Jerusalem is the center of his religious life and focus. And what did Jesus famously say about your hometown, so to speak? You know, a prophet is not without honor except where he's from. And although Paul is from Tarsus, he spent years in Jerusalem as a Pharisee at the feet of Gamaliel and then operating on behalf of the Sanhedrin to arrest the Christians who were heretics from the law of Moses, chasing him all the way to Damascus.

He was well-known. He tells three different times the story of the Damascus Road and says what a faithful Jew he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, born on the eighth day, well, circumcised on the eighth day after being born and all of his credentials recognized and esteemed in Jerusalem. Then as he becomes a Christian and an apostle, he loses that.

And there's a sense in which he wants to come back to Jerusalem and be vindicated and he wants his people to be vindicated. And it's a wonderful thing. You can do things out of love for those around you.

We love those in our periphery and we want there to be good feeling and happiness and acceptance all around. What is the first love? What love did Paul lose in concentrating on the Gentiles, concentrating on Jerusalem and concentrating on himself? He becomes deaf to the voice of the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit says, well, you may be deaf to my voice.

Maybe you're not blind to a play act by Agabus. But Paul rejects that as well and goes down a bad path that only hurts and damages the situation in Jerusalem. There are Jewish Christians who have found their own accommodation of Christianity and the law.

But when Paul comes in, he makes an issue out of the differences. Instead of the unity of the Jerusalem church, even if they are overemphasizing the law, there is a peaceful accommodation. But when Paul comes in, it rocks the boat.

It makes an issue that they can no longer tolerate and they become violent. They split up. They factionalize.

Now everybody's eyes are on people. If Paul had stayed away, the Jerusalem church might have grown out of its focus on the law of Moses in a gradual fashion. Instead of being forced to confront circumcision, remember Titus not being circumcised and they thought Paul had taken him into the temple and vows and offerings and all of this other would not have come to a head the way that it did in Jerusalem if Paul had not gone.

What's the point? When Jesus tells the Ephesians, I have this against you. Your doctrine is straight. You're working in my name.

You're laboring for my name, but you have lost your first love. So it is for the name, but it has settled into some form of habitual practice that isn't actually motivated by love for God, isn't informed by faith and motivated by hope. And this is why Jesus says, you need to remember from where you have fallen.

You used to be in a higher place. Higher is closer to God, right? If you have fallen, you're down the mountain. You're not up high anymore.

This is a vertical descent. He doesn't say you've isolated yourself from the poor. You have failed to minister to the oppressed.

You're working, you're laboring and you're doing it in the Lord's name, but you have fallen. You are further from God. You've lost that first love, the most important love, the love for God, appreciation for God, worship of God, appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans and I hate them too, and that's good, but you need to change your mind. You need to get your heart and your head right, looking to the Lord God in heaven, looking to the Lord Jesus Christ, listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, wherever that may lead, however it may be contrary to our heart's desire. That is the problem in Ephesus.

So as we turn back now to 1 Timothy and we see Paul's exhortation, Paul sees the danger. He sees it in Acts chapter 20 and he warns the Ephesian elders, there is a real and present danger of bad teaching, false doctrine, another gospel. You must confront this.

But how is he to confront it? I urged you when I went into Macedonia, remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies. There's always been speculation on what these fables and genealogies were. If you go to a parallel exhortation in Titus, Paul uses the adjective Jewish, Jewish fables.

These would be the additions and accretions and rabbinical expansions on Bible stories. You find some of these in the apocryphal writings that are not inspired in our Bible. You find them in a Catholic Bible, but these fables were thought to have merit and value as parables, as story problems and so on.

Not to give heed to fables. These are probably Jewish fables and endless genealogies. People focusing on, well, do I have a heritage? Remember the Jews who said to Jesus, we have Abraham as our father and you get the idea that people in the Roman Empire who had been scattered from Jerusalem wanted to prove that they were actually Jews.

There's a parallel today and there's a sizable percentage of the American population that has some Native American ancestry back there somewhere. You can't swing a cat without hitting somebody that had a Cherokee princess in the past. There's no such thing as a Cherokee princess, but you'll find people, their family lore says, oh, my great-great-grandmother was this, that, and the other.

And if you want to join one of the federally recognized tribes, you have to document your descendancy. Even if you got one drop of blood and you stubbed your toe as a child and lost it, if you can prove that great-great-great-grandma was something in some tribe, well, you now have established that connection and you're entitled to all of the rights, privileges thereunto pertaining in that particular nation. The Jews here in Ephesus have been, they're part of the diaspora.

They're in Asia, Western Asia. So to be able to prove their Jewishness and document it seems to have been a big deal. To try to maintain a connection to the homeland and to the Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob heritage, and therefore to the law of Moses by this physical descendancy.

We're not so troubled by Jewish fables. We may not be worried about our ancestry, although, you know, my 26 or DNA 43 or all of these different places you can send a cheek swab off and find out, you know, I'm 3% Norwegian and I'm this, that, and the other. But that's not really a problem for us spiritually.

So these are examples of the kind of thing that we can identify in our hearts, in our conversation, in our goals and priorities and values by their effects. What are the effects of these fables and genealogies? What do they do? Look at what Paul says. They cause disputes rather than godly edification.

Ah, now, maybe I don't have genealogies and fables, but are there disputes that just lead to endless debates? Get up on a chat board that is ostensibly dedicated to Scripture and the understanding thereof and they had to section off the Calvinist versus Armenians because all they do is fight each other tooth and nail. Nobody gets edified. It's just, I'm gonna hit you over the head with my proof text and well, I'm gonna counter punch with my proof text and this, that, there's, and some of us have tried it and left.

All of us that went in on some of these boards and tried to shine a light or ask a question or have you thought about this? It does not lead to edification. It instead leads to just further disputes. You can have other biblically related examples which I gave in the past.

Young earth, old earth, creationism. What about the flood? And if it leads to disputes, even if it is legitimate, I'll give you an example of a legitimate issue that needs to be understood. Is God going to fulfill his promises to the nation and the people of Israel as given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Moses, to those people or have those been abrogated because of Israel's rejection of Christ and they are now fulfilled in and to the church and Israel's done.

And so therefore, there's no need to believe in a literal millennium or a literal resurrection of the Old Testament saints to have the specific fulfillment of all of those promises given in the major and minor prophets. There's an understanding that is critical. It affects your view of what the church is because if there's no literal millennium, then it's millennium now.

It's kingdom now. Jesus is king now and we've got to build it so he will come, so to speak. And it's a kingdom of the heart and I can start reigning the Old Testament for promises that should be fulfilled in my life and disregard any literal fulfillment.

I'm just going to spiritualize everything. I'm going to say that the book of Revelation was fulfilled in 70 AD and Nero was the 666 beast and I don't have to pay attention to Revelation except as history because it's all fulfilled. This is not future.

There's not going to be seals, trumpets and bowls and vials. Now, this is an important understanding to have. It directly affects one third of our Christian virtues, which is our hope.

It affects another third of our Christian virtues in that it changes the content of our faith and inevitably, if you mess with faith and hope, it is going to change your understanding of love and what it is and should be and you'll misunderstand how that love should be directed and to whom it should be applied and so on. And these are important understandings, but if I begin to discuss this with someone and the result is not godly edification, if a conversation starts and these issues are raised and Agabus comes in and wraps a belt around his hands and feet and says, do you see the reception you're going to get with this information? It is true. God is at work among the Gentiles.

It is true that we are not under law, but under grace. It is true that the Gentiles are ready and willing to express their love and literally put their money where their mouth is and send it to the poor saints in Jerusalem. All of that is true.

All of that is true. But there is a time and a place to present truth. And there is a time and a place not to.

How many times have we seen the Lord Jesus after performing a healing miracle, tell no man. Peter, James and John, Mount of Transfiguration, tell no one. Is it true? Is it right? Is it meaningful and helpful to me? Is it in many ways central and important? But there is a time and a place.

Paul was not to take those truths to Jerusalem. It was destructive and not constructive. If he had heeded his own advice, do not partake of, do not participate in, do not tolerate the presentation of, could these genealogies be true? Fables, probably not, but the genealogy might be true.

But what is its result? What is the result of anything we undertake? If it causes disputes rather than godly edification, which is in faith. Everything needs to drive back to faith. We lay hold of righteousness by faith.

We secure our inheritance in the future by faith. We encourage one another to love and good works in the faith. It is our means of accomplishing the Christian life, is faith.

And whatever is not of faith is sin. And if you don't come away from a discussion, if you don't come away from fellowship, if you don't come away with conversation and contact, if you don't come away in the faith and unified in love, did Paul come away from Jerusalem with greater unity, with more faith, with the love of the Jerusalem saints? He went there and made everything worse. It was worse for them and it was worse for him.

The riots and disturbances there brought the Romans down on the Jerusalem church. Paul himself gets incarcerated for two years and can't do his God-given ministry. His Christ-appointed apostleship is on hold for two solid years in Jerusalem.

He can't even entertain guests, at least when he's in Rome. He's under house arrest and he can talk about the kingdom and preach and do all sorts of things while he's there. The Romans are watching him, but he is free, not in Jerusalem.

He is completely on hold. Two whole years of the apostle Paul's life are wasted in Jerusalem because he disregards the guidance of the Holy Spirit and he knows better. He tells Timothy here, don't engage in things that just lead to disputes and not to godly edification in faith.

So if we begin a thing or we get caught up in a thing or we are in a relationship or a conversation or a situation where disputes and no edification are all that takes place, Paul says, you got to put a stop to it. I urged you, I commanded you, teach no other doctrine, no other doctrine than the doctrine Paul taught there for three and a half years and Timothy continues to teach. The purpose of the commandment, the commandment is verse three, I urged you, charge some, teach no other doctrine.

The purpose of this commandment is, what is it that Ephesus lost according to the Lord Jesus in Revelation 2? What had they lost? They were doing well doctrinally. They were

doing well labor-wise. What had they lost? Their first love.

Timothy ensures that they get their doctrine straight and that they learn to identify and repudiate error. But what did they not learn? What did they not absorb and practice? Paul says, the goal of this commandment is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. We're back to that faith.

Faith is the means. Disputes don't enhance faith. If there's no godly edification, you're not helping faith.

Love has to come from a pure heart. This is recognition of sin, creating me a clean heart, O God, renew a right spirit within me, Psalm 51. A good conscience, your norms and standards, your understanding of moral right and wrong.

You can't cloud that over. You can't paint it over. You can't shove it aside and ignore moral right and moral wrong.

The purpose of the commandment, the goal of our instruction, is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, a functioning set of standards that clings to what is good and eschews what is evil, and sincere faith. Remember, we looked at this in our last session some weeks back. This is the word unhyprocritical, not hyprocrites.

Unhyprocritical. What you see is the truth from the outside to the core. It's not a faith that acts one way and thinks another.

It's not a faith that puts on a front, wears a mask. Love has to come from a transparent, faithful, moral, sin-recognizing and sin-confessing person, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to superficial talk, to unhelpful, idle, shallow conversation. Not recognizing the critical importance.

These people are a light in a city of a quarter of a million people, the Ephesians. How important is it for them to shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation? When someone looks at them, what should they see? A pure heart. A good conscience.

And a sincere faith. An uncompromising faith. A first love.

A love for God. That brooks no competition. That doesn't fade.

That doesn't get abandoned. From which we do not fall. Some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.

They're talking about things that they do not really understand. We have to know the truth before we can communicate the truth. There's so many things you can say about truth.

I will just share one in closing. There is a notion, and you see it today, related to truth called false balance. False balance.

You can look this up probably in Wikipedia. It's also called both sides-ism, where there is one perspective, there is one set of facts and a preponderance of evidence that makes it clear that this is just 98%, 99% certainly the way it is. But there is this 1% or 2% countervailing view.

As an example, did astronauts land on the moon in 1969, whenever it was, or was it a Hollywood mock-up? Was there a plane that flew into the Pentagon on 9-11? Or do the crazies who say they never found the engines, they never found the pieces of the plane. If you give equal weight to those two points of view, and you don't talk about how unlikely it is to be this other, you give it equal weight because, well, it hasn't been disproven that it was a Hollywood mock-up when they landed on the moon. It hasn't been disproven that there was no airplane.

I give scant weight to the evidence and so on. But you give equivalence. In the world of evolution and abiogenesis, scientific explanations for how life began and how it has proliferated on the planet, they believe that even talking about creationism or the biblical account is false balance.

That the truth of God's word should not be given equal weight with their scientific speculations and reconstructions and hypotheses and theories. And we, on the other hand, look at science and say that's a false balance. You've as yet got no viable mechanism for abiogenesis.

You can't explain the creation of information in DNA. You can look up charts to find the odds of molecules self-assembling into even the simplest self-replicating molecule. They've gotten it down to where, well, we can construct a molecule if it has 1,500 parts.

That would be enough. The odds of those 1,500 parts coming together in the right order and creating a self-replicating molecule are beyond astronomical. It's beyond the number of molecules in the universe.

It's beyond the number of seconds since the Big Bang. The possibility of it is essentially impossible. And yet they believe that not only is it a balance of choices but that theirs is right and God's creation and design are wrong.

So what does this tell you? The idea of false balance of what is true and what is not and what is a viable competing theory and what is not is entirely based on one's own presuppositions, on your bias, on your past beliefs, on your current understandings. And you can think the other guy is astronomically wrong. He can think that you are astronomically wrong.

And if someone is not willing to entertain arguments and evidence, all that conversation

is going to do is lead to disputes. You can engage in avoidance and say, well, I just won't talk about the things that would create a debate and so on. And that's good to a point.

But some of our beliefs are definitional. Our first love is something from which we cannot fall. Right? And despite Paul's years of ministry, despite Timothy's years of ministry, faithfully keeping the truth in view and in line and pushing away error and falsehood, what is Jesus' evaluation of the Ephesian church? The first one he gives to John in Revelation.

You've lost your first love. You need to change your mind because your mind affects how your faith and hope and love work themselves out. How do we change our mind? Or let me put it another way.

How do we renew our mind? That should bring a verse to your consciousness. Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. This is a matter of priorities and goals.

I beseech you by the mercies of God, present yourself a living sacrifice. To do this requires sacrifice. Sacrifice isn't easy.

We have to give something up in sacrifice. We have to put something on the altar in sacrifice. We have to let go of things in sacrifice.

To be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we can understand God's good and acceptable and perfect will. Paul didn't want to give those things up and he ends up in Jerusalem incarcerated for no good purpose. God uses Paul's imprisonments in many fruitful ways, but he doesn't write a single letter from his incarceration in Jerusalem.

We have no inspired words from Paul. It's just wasted time for two years. He has to finally appeal to Caesar and get transported to Rome.

This is the shipwreck. Then Paul is back in circulation. Even in chains, he's at least where he is supposed to be.

He can start preaching and teaching again. He can witness to the Praetorian Guard and the rest of it. God can work it together for good when we screw up, but that's not the perfect will.

In some cases, it's not even the acceptable will. It's just the good will. Well, something to think about for us, but it gives us some context for these words to Timothy.

Yes, you can keep your doctrine straight. Yes, you can reject false teaching. But what is most important is cultivating, focusing on, and ensuring that our minds are right about our first love that enables us to do the first works, the most important works, which are the works toward God and then the works toward our immediate periphery of one

another's.

Well, we'll pick up in verse 4 of chapter 1 of Timothy 4 through 7 next time. We'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for these wonderful depictions of situations and communication of truth in your word.

It is so critical for us to understand, to internalize, and to apply in our own lives. We pray that your Holy Spirit will speak to us, guide us, and lead us in the word, and will do so in a way that we will recognize and heed to change our minds where they need changing, to focus our attention where it needs to be aimed, and to live our lives in a way that receives the commendation of your Son, the Lord Jesus, at His judgment seat when He returns to take us to Himself and present us before your throne. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.