

1Tim 23-08-27b

We're ready now to continue, we're ready now, we're ready to continue our study in 1st Timothy. We've taken a look at the content that Paul is so emphatic in charging Timothy with preserving and looking at Ephesians chapter 3, really the whole book of Ephesians is a summary of this apostolic church age oikonomia truth. What is it that we are responsible for? And when you think about this notion of unity in the church that is to be preserved by preserving the testimony and the teaching on which it is founded, this unity is grounded in the truth of scripture.

And so if people are going to have differences of understanding in the scripture then group together around that. And I personally have no problem with there being denominations in the sense that those who understand scripture to teach a certain way should fellowship together and be unified in that understanding with the goal of glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ individually and as a group. And if I think they're all wet on eschatology or I think they're all wet on the role of the Holy Spirit, I can certainly try not to perpetrate what I believe to be an erroneous understanding myself, but to make it my business to go and attack somebody because I don't like the cut of their jib, I don't like their emphasis or their direction or the fact that they do and don't do this, that and the other, is more wrong than the mistake they may or may not be making in scripture.

And each of us needs to be convinced. How does this work out in terms of application? Not only in terms of let's find a fellowship of believers and join it and stick with it and be of one heart and one mind with joy and peace in the Holy Spirit, encouraging one another, praying for one another, having that brother and sister in Christ relationship, but this also extends to our overall function day by day. If it's a bad idea to dispute and argue and debate and criticize within the church, it is equally fruitless and unreflective of the values and the goals of our Christian faith to do so on the outside.

And if we become those who carp and criticize and throw rocks because of politics or because of social emphases or what people choose to do with their time and their money and we become critics and sort of known for that, well don't get him started on that subject. It's going to be a harangue and it's going to last for 20 minutes. And you see the egregious excess of this in people who decide that they are anti-Semitic or they are anti-immigrant or they are anti-fill-in-the-blank and it becomes a hobby horse to be ridden and it becomes sort of a defining characteristic.

Well, so-and-so really hates that group or that practice or that concept even when it is in fact wrong. And I'll tell you, one of the reasons is I have assiduously tried to not follow quote news stories and be absorbed by them because I don't think it's helpful. I like to be informed enough to generally know, you know, what's going on.

But to get invested in it and have my mood or my view of the day altered by something

that somebody is putting out on a small or a large screen is a distraction. That's what Paul is preaching against in 1 Timothy when he tells him, I urge you, charge some that they don't make issues out of narratives and out of connections, out of groupings. Genealogies divides people by heritage.

Fables is a narrative. And as I said, the Greek kind of ties these two together. Because there are these groups, because there are these cultures, because there are these ethnicities or these identifications, I'm going to tell you a narrative.

This is the problem with the country. For generations and for centuries in this and other countries, people want to blame everything on the Jews. And there is a satanic underpinning to some of that.

But if you spend time demonizing and vilifying and finding fault and looking outward, every second that that takes place is time that we are not cultivating the inner voice of the Holy Spirit and the testimony of God's Word, the apostolic witness to representing the Lord Jesus Christ. How much time did the Lord Jesus Christ spend talking about the political figures of his day? He mentions Herod once or twice, calls him a fox. Beware the leaven of Herod.

I think that's the only two times I can remember Jesus mentioned him other than during his arrest and trials. But did Jesus spend time preaching to the crowds about the evils of the Roman Empire and the awful practices in Rome and the Caesar and in the Roman army and the excesses of slave trading and slave ownership? What is Jesus' emphasis? What is the emphasis in Scripture? Does Paul spend time vilifying the politics and the politicians of his day? Keep reading in Ephesians and get over to chapter 4 and chapter 5. Look at what he emphasizes here to Timothy. Those who desire, in verse 7, to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.

They are looking right at the law and they are affirming Old Testament Scripture in the law, but they don't actually understand it. As I mentioned before, Jesus points this out in the Sermon on the Mount in His, You have heard it said, but I say. These are those who are quoting the law and misusing it.

Here's what you ought to think. Here's how it ought to be applied, Jesus says. But he continues, in verse 8, we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully.

And these are two different forms of the same word, *nomos*. We know that the *nomos* is good if you use it according to the rules, if it is used properly. Properly means you follow the rules.

Well, what does he mean by this? The law is good if it is understood properly and invoked properly. So the law can be misused. Knowing this, verse 9, the law is not made

for a righteous person.

Take that out and put it on a little sign to hang from your rear view mirror. The law is not made for a righteous person. So if I consider myself to be righteous, can I ignore the law? What is Paul saying here? Is the law of no value if you're righteous? The law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless, this is the anomos, lawless and insubordinate, the ungodly and for sinners, the unholy and profane.

In a nutshell, what is Paul saying? The law defines what unrighteousness is. And in summary, what these who desire to be teachers of the law, they are using the law as a means of spirituality. If you, if you don't violate the law, you're spiritual.

So think about a number line. You got negative numbers, you have zero and you have positive numbers. These people are saying, as long as you don't break the law, you are righteous.

If you're not in the negative numbers, just get to zero, you're righteous. Righteousness by the works of the law, i.e. not violating the law. And that's why Paul goes on to talk about all of the things that the law calls out as sin, as evil, as unrighteousness.

So you can find out if you are lawless or insubordinate, you're unamenable to authority, you don't want to be submissive, you don't want to follow the rules. Insubordinate means I don't have the humility to recognize structure and instruction. I'll do my own thing.

I'll make my own definitions of what's right and wrong. So the law is made to show what lawlessness and insubordination is. The ungodly and for sinners.

You can see that this is ungodliness and this is sin by looking at the law. Unholy and profane. This is what is not sanctified.

This is what is not part of God's will and God's word and God's plan. This shows you all of the wrong. So think about our own laws in the modern day, our civil laws.

Is there a law that says giving to a charity is a wonderful thing? Our laws are designed to constrain and control bad behavior. That's what the law is for. Law enforcement doesn't stop you and give you \$20 because you're obeying the speed limit.

It doesn't come out and congratulate you and shake your hand because you support a charity or because you volunteer your time and you dole out stuff at a soup kitchen. That's not the job of the law or law enforcement. It is designed to control and hem in and invoke penalties for bad behavior.

This is Paul's point. These who desire to be teachers of the law, they're basically telling everyone just don't eat meat with the blood, don't eat things strangled, don't murder, don't rob, don't give false witness and you're a wonderful representative of God. That

isn't it.

Notice if you go back to Ephesians and look at Paul's stewardship of the mystery of fellowship, of the one another's, of cultivating renewal of the mind and rightly dividing the word of truth and being kind one to another, tenderhearted and forgiving one another. These are the positive sides. You're not going to get that from the law.

The law doesn't say be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. The law just says this is sin. So in Romans, by the law comes the knowledge of sin.

I was alive once apart from the law, but when the law came, sin revived and I died because the law identifies and clarifies and calls out this is sin. This is wrong. And the law is that to which the elders would resort to determine penalty and punishment and restitution and so on for wrongdoing.

This is what you should not do. And we've talked many times about if you're trying to break a bad habit, you've got to do more than sit there staring at a pack of cigarettes on the table and saying, I am not going to pick one of those up, and I'm not going to stick it in my mouth, and I'm not going to light it, and I'm not going to puff on it. I am not going to do that bad thing.

It's bad for me, bad for my health. I can see on the package, the surgeon general has determined this is harmful to my health. So I'm just going to sit there.

If you want to successfully break a bad habit, you have got to do something in its stead. This is Hebrews, change of mind away from dead works and in its place, faith toward God. Turn from idols to worship the living God.

Paul says to the Gentiles, you've turned aside from idols to worship the living God, not just eschewing the idols and sitting there at zero. So the scriptures, the word of God, profitable teaching that Timothy is charged with presenting is not just the do not do these things, thou shalt not, but here's the productive, fruitful, Spirit-filled, Scripture-guided, reflect the glory of Christ life. And these teachers of the law don't understand spirituality.

They don't understand the law. The law is holy, righteous, and good, but it is not the means of spiritual growth and health and production. So the law is not made for a righteous person.

Remember Paul says in another place, to the pure, all things are pure. Why? You don't need the law if you have a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. You are so far into the positive side of what is pleasing to God, you don't have to be told, don't murder your parents.

As it says here in verse 9, murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine. If you're immersed in sound doctrine, nobody needs to tell you the penalties. I think about serving in the military, and if you are dedicated to doing the best possible job as an infantryman or artilleryman or a tanker or someone in intelligence, you don't need somebody bringing up the uniform code of military justice and saying, well you know, if you steal government property you can be imprisoned, and if you strike your superior officer you can be court marshaled.

I don't need to know that because I would never do that. I am a good Marine. I understand authority.

I'm not going to strike my superior officer. I'm not going to steal something that doesn't belong to me. I'm not going to take weapons out of the armory and go off and perpetrate a robbery with them or something.

I'm not going to misuse my opportunities and my provision and my training for nefarious purposes. Why would I? I'm a good Marine. I am so invested in trying to be the best of the best.

You don't have to tell me about these stupid self-serving bad things that people might do for which they will get locked up in federal prison. So anything that is contrary to sound doctrine. What is that sound doctrine? Ephesians is a great example of it.

Every chapter in Ephesians is stuffed with sound doctrine. The positive side of the Christian faith. According to verse 11, the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.

Once again Paul emphasizes this commitment, this stewardship. He doesn't even say commitment. He says committed to our trust.

He says committed to my trust. Paul is the apostle to the church that includes Gentiles and Jews. The fellowship of the mysteries, the stewardship of the mysteries, the glorious gospel of the blessed God is communicated to us through the apostle Paul.

That's why the bulk of the New Testament, outside of the gospels, three quarters of it is Paul. Especially if you include Hebrews, which I think should be. Peter says there are people who are taking Paul's words and twisting them to their own destruction.

He doesn't say they're taking the Lord Jesus' words. He says they're taking Paul's words and they're twisting them to their own harm. Peter says that.

Peter understands. Peter gets rebuked by Paul in his dealings with the Gentiles. And this is the Peter that saw the sheet let down.

Arise Peter, kill and eat. And yet men from James trip him up. And men from James, these are the guys who can't let go of the law and think that the law is a means of righteousness.

And they even trip the apostle Paul himself, as we've seen. So he says in verse 12, I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me because he counted me faithful putting me into the ministry. There is a lot of first person singular in this chapter.

And we need to respect it. You only have two choices. Either Paul is delusional and he should be tossed out of the Bible, or he is an inspired apostle and what he says is God's truth.

And Paul says this stewardship was entrusted to him. The Lord Jesus Christ called him. God, the Holy Spirit has by revelation given him the stewardship of this information to be communicated.

And that's what Paul went to prison multiple times, was shipwrecked, received the 40 stripes minus one, was stoned and left for dead in Lystra. All of the hardship that he endured for decades was faithfulness to this calling. Paul didn't get rich.

He didn't get famous in a positive and lucrative sense. He became infamous and he was persecuted. Why would he do that? Did he just have some sort of a martyr complex and he wanted people to hate him? He wanted to be locked up.

He wanted to be beaten. He wanted to be rejected. He wanted to be scourged and imprisoned and all the rest of it.

You either believe Paul is a God-ordained, Christ-appointed apostle or you don't. And if you believe that he is, then he is the source of the bulk of our church-age truth and understanding. And what he says goes because it has the authority of God behind it.

He is an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Savior. So anybody that in any way attacks or diminishes the authority of the Pauline letters is somebody from whom I am going to separate because they are denying the authority of God Himself. And that is what Paul calls out here the lawless and insubordinate.

Insubordinate. Unwilling to recognize and submit to the authority of God which has expression in God-ordained positions such as apostle, such as husband, such as government. These are God-ordained and we submit to those who have the rule over us in a church.

If there are elders in that church and they say this is what we are going to do, you respect and submit to that or you leave. Make your own group. You like a different set of rules, get a group, go with those rules.

Find somebody that agrees with you or start your own. But disunity is a cardinal sin in a New Testament church. And I am so grateful our church has been so reflective of unity and joy and peace, camaraderie, fellowship, looking out for one another, praying for one another, supporting one another.

And I believe that the reason for that is that we all share an understanding of the Word of God that says that is a priority. And love should be sacrificial to self and beneficial to others. And the thing of which I am most grateful, about which I am most grateful, is that across these many years – I can't even count them – we've had great unity.

We've had wonderful fellowship and the fulfillment of one another. And I believe that God's Holy Spirit and God's Word have enabled and empowered that for us. And I don't know very many churches that haven't split over something.

You know, they talk about too big to fail. I think we're too small to split. And I think that's probably a good thing.

But this is why Paul says, for the very same reason, I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man. But I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. Much hay has been raised about this.

All Paul is saying is I was not being a persecutor and an insolent man out of a rebellious spirit, out of he was misguided and misled. And he absorbed the Judaism of his day, the Pharisaism of his day, and he genuinely believed that he was serving God in persecuting the church. He believed that he was defending the faith and the God of Israel against a blasphemous and false teacher and teaching.

He did not believe in the Lord Jesus at that time, and he was ignorant of the truth of the Lord Jesus. So he had, as he describes his fellow Jews in Romans, a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Many of us in the past have believed things and practiced things that we thought were right and thought were true at the time, not out of a rebellious spirit or being insubordinate and lawless, but being misguided in thinking that we were doing what was right in God's sight.

And God in His grace reveals the truth to us, and because God is merciful and works with us even when we are in error, and while we were yet sinners Christ died for us, and while we are on the road and we are immature and believing things that aren't true and aren't right and aren't helpful and aren't proper, we can look in our past and see legalism or see a false standard of spirituality or see where we have been hurtful and hateful to others when we should not have been. It did not reflect the best of the fruit of the Spirit and so on. We can look back and just wince and cringe and cry over mistakes we have made in the past.

And Paul says, God has made an example out of me. None of you screwed up as badly as I did. As a follower of God, Paul says, of sinners I am chief.

I am the least of all saints. I persecuted the very church that I am now an apostle for. I thank Christ Jesus our Lord.

Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man. Notice the three directions of subjectivity here. Blaspheming is speaking against God, right? Blasphemy is a sin against God.

Persecutor is a sin against your fellow man, your fellow believers. And insolent man this is his personal attitude. Insolent, too sure and too confident of his own rightness.

When he looked at himself, he was convinced that he was right. So blasphemy toward God, persecution toward others, and insolence, arrogance in his own heart. Paul says, any direction you pointed me, I was messing it up.

But I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly and in unbelief. Now, is everyone who is ignorant and unbelieving, ignorant and faithless going to receive mercy? Why does Paul receive this mercy? Repentance. Change of mind.

When Jesus confronts him on the Damascus road with truth, Paul changes his mind and changes his heart and is willing to listen. Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? Persecuting others, what you have done to others, you are doing to me, Jesus says. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, verse 14, the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. How is Paul able to obtain and receive and exploit this abundant mercy of God? Faith and love. This faith and this love are the first and great commandment.

This is vertical love. This is love for God. This is the faith and love in Christ Jesus.

From a persecutor of those who believe in Christ, denying that Jesus Christ was who he claimed to be and who God sent him to be, Paul changes his mind and he has faith and love in and for Christ Jesus. That is the means of obtaining mercy. I can't get a bottle of mercy and hand it to someone who doesn't have that attitude.

Someone who does not believe the Lord Jesus Christ and someone who does not love the God who loved them and sent his son to die on their behalf, John 3.16. If there is not a fellowship of love between a person and God the Father, mercy will not come. Mercy will not come. The grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant with faith and love.

Not just mercy period. Faith and love. It is not God's faith.

This is Paul's faith. This is Paul's love. Paul's love for God when he recognizes the

expression of God's love in the person of Jesus Christ and places his faith in Christ.

Now he is in line for mercy. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. It is a phrase that Paul is going to use several times.

Six or seven times he is going to say this is a faithful saying and a couple of times he is going to say and it is worthy of all acceptance. People have speculated this faithful saying is evidently something that Paul expects that Timothy has heard before. Was this in hymn lyrics? Was this something that was already circulating? I would submit to you that this is something that has already been communicated by the prophets.

The New Testament individuals that had the prophetic gift have been unanimous in communicating this saying. This is something that precedes and predates Paul's communication to these groups. So he says this has been communicated by the holy, the sanctified apostles and prophets.

So where do these New Testament sayings come from? That's where. If it isn't Paul, he doesn't say you have heard me say. He says this is a faithful saying.

This saying can be trusted and it has come from these prophetic witnesses in the churches. What is this saying? This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. Everybody ought to unite and accept this, be drawn together and affirm together this saying.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. That's where the faithful saying ends. You can close the quote at the comma and then Paul says of whom I am chief.

It's not a widely spread quotation. We know Paul is the worst sinner. Every church says well if you want to know who the worst sinner is, it's Paul.

The faithful saying is Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. You have heard me talk about progressive Christianity and this faithful saying that is worthy of all acceptance is not accepted in this large and growing swath that claims to be Christian. Let me give you a quick rundown of what Paul said.

Paul said this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. Let me give you a quick rundown of the affirmations that are shared by this new definition of Christianity. This is put out by the Center for Progressive Christianity and is a major network of progressive churches, ministers, and lay leaders.

They have articulated the identifying factors of progressive Christianity. Progressive Christians are Christians who allow our understanding of Christianity to evolve according to scientific and biblical scholarship. They have expressed this in eight points.

Number one, we believe that following the way and teachings of Jesus can lead to

experiencing sacredness, wholeness, and unity of all life even as we recognize that the Spirit moves in beneficial ways in many faith traditions. The Holy Spirit can invest Buddhism and Hindu beliefs and Confucianism and Islam and the Spirit moves in beneficial ways in many faith traditions. What happened to John 14.6, I ask.

Number two, seek community that is inclusive of all people, honoring differences in theological perspective, age, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, slash expression, class, or ability. Honoring differences in theological perspective. I can let someone go be warmed, be fed, but what they're talking about is we're going to group together and honor each other's differences.

We're not going to be united. There's not going to be one Lord. There can be many expressions of the Spirit in terms of lords and salvation and gender expression and so on.

So it's unity at the expense of the instruction on which that unity is to be founded according to the Apostle Paul. Paul says, teach no other doctrine. Allow the teaching of no other gospel.

This is a faithful saying. Jesus Christ came to save sinners. Number three for progressives, strive for peace and justice among all people, knowing that behaving with compassion and selfless love toward one another is the fullest expression of what we believe.

I won't quibble with that, although I could. Embrace the insight number four of contemporary science and strive to protect the earth and ensure its integrity and sustainability. This is the integration of a social belief into your Christianity.

Five, commit to a path of lifelong learning, believing that there is more value in questioning than in absolutes. I'm not going to take scriptural teaching as absolute. God is love.

God redeems and reconciles us all. Everybody's God's child. Everybody's going to be saved.

This is the inevitable destination of universalism. Yes, there should be unity. Yes, there should be harmony.

Yes, there should be respect for those who differ from us, but not within the local church because differences inevitably lead to debates and to divisions. Read 1 Corinthians. So this emphasis is on, and the core value on which we can unite is, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

This is his atoning, redemptive, reconciliatory work, and any watering down, modification, or compromise in that is no longer adhering to the faithful saying, worthy

of all acceptance. Christ Jesus didn't come to serve as an example of our inhumanity. He didn't come to sort of prod us into being better people.

He didn't come to just manifest love and good works. He came to save sinners. And like Paul, we need to recognize that we are the destination of that purpose.

I am a sinner. And this notion, you know, was he really the worst sinner that ever lived? And if you don't believe he was the worst sinner, you're not a literalist in the Bible. This protos, the word protos, first, he's talking about the chief example.

I am a prominent example. If you're looking for an example, I'll give you me first. I'm as bad as they come.

I was as bad as they come. He's not literally the worst sinner that ever lived. He's not worse than Pol Pot or Stalin or Hitler, you know, that you can name.

He says, you know, the first example that comes to mind is me. Christ Jesus came to save sinners. You want an example? Let me put myself at the top of the list of examples.

Not the only one, not necessarily and technically the worst, but sinners, I'm as bad as it gets. Look at what I did. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, not only because I expressed faith and love in Christ Jesus, but that in me first, Jesus Christ might show all long suffering as a pattern to those who are going to believe on him.

If he can save Paul, he can save me for everlasting life. We'll save verse 17 for next time, this wonderful doxology. Let me just give you a preview of coming attractions.

One of the most common beliefs and claims and statements and practices currently in quote unquote mainstream Christianity today is that this is the kingdom and Jesus is the king. Read verse 17 from the pen of the apostle Paul and tell me who is the king. We have the hymn and Dan and Anna have rendered it for us many times, wonderful arrangements, immortal, invisible, God only, wise.

He dwells in light, inexpressible, he's hid from our eyes. It is this God who sent the Lord Jesus Christ to the king, eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. The king is God the father.

And this is not the only place he says it. We'll see more about this next time, but don't get sucked into the misleading notion that we're in the kingdom and Jesus is the king and it's kingdom now. Jesus is not on that throne.

He's at the right hand of the father awaiting the day when his enemies are made his footstool. Think about Hebrews. We come by a new and living way, the torn flesh of the Lord Jesus, that veil.

So what does the author Paul in Hebrews say? Let us come boldly to the throne of grace

for help in time of need. Throne of grace? Who sits on a throne? If Jesus is the new and living way by whom we have access into the throne room and we come before the throne, who are we coming to for grace and help in time of need? Who sits on a throne? The king. The king, eternal, immortal, invisible.

We pray to God the father upon the instruction of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. The king is God the father. Our king is the father.

Flat out, repeated in scripture numerous times and in numerous ways. We'll see that next time. It's an important distinction.

It is important understanding to not get mixed up on who is the king, what is the kingdom, and what is my place and role with respect to the king and the kingdoms that scripture teaches about. We'll delve into that next time. But precious, valuable, and important is our unity and our fellowship.

Not just within the church but with anyone who is in the household of faith. If we find ourselves being argumentative, being hypercritical, it is one thing to discern and say, I don't think that's a good idea. I am not going to do that.

But to make it our business to lift up others for negative scrutiny and scorn and vilification, that is not Christ. That is not Christianity and is to be avoided at all costs. Father thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the guidance and the clear light it shines on our path. We pray that we will have the perspicacity to see its application in our time and our circumstance, the interactions we have with others, what we become known for, what the pattern of our life and our conversation is, and that built on the rock and the solid foundation of your son, the Lord Jesus, our lives will reflect his glory and yours. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen.