

Russell Kelfer

Dr. Paul's Prescription

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Series: I Timothy

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10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org

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DR. PAUL'S DIAGNOSIS

If we could catalog life's less pleasant experiences, most of us would put "going to the doctor" high on the list. It's sometimes painful, often humiliating, usually expensive, and is often only the beginning of a long process. The general rule of thumb is that what the good doc is going to do is: a) listen to the symptoms described, b) test you to see what's wrong, c) prescribe a possible cure, and d) tell you to come back in a few weeks to see if the cure is working.

Sometimes the problem is simple, and so is the cure. Often, had we just done *what he told us to the last time we were there*, we wouldn't even be in the predicament we're in. Either way, it's not something we look forward to, and, in fact, is usually something we avoid as long as possible.

Spiritually, I think the same thing is true, maybe even more so. The reason, I believe, is that spiritual symptoms are harder to recognize, easier to ignore, and less comfortable to confront. So we just let things slide, and days turn into weeks, weeks into months, months into years, and we keep saying to ourselves, "I've got to get things straight with the Lord one of these days".

The Apostle Paul didn't buy that program. He knew that the longer you postponed dealing with apostasy or deliberate rebellion, the harder it would be to take the medicine once it was prescribed. Like narcotics, sin tends to build a habit pattern that becomes progressively more difficult to break as time goes by.

Dr. Paul had been looking carefully at the health charts of the Ephesian church. Suddenly, something caught his eye. It was right there in the X-rays. There was an ominous-looking growth, *right next to the heart*; and if surgery didn't take place, it was sure to spread. He had seen this disease before, and if left untended, the result, as always, spiritual death.

So Dr. Paul got out his prescription pad and sent a memo

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to his assistant, an intern with great potential to follow in his footsteps. His name was Dr. Timothy. He had been given the responsibility for the care and keeping of the patient in Dr. Paul's absence.

The memo said basically this: there is a malignant intrusion into the life of that church called "false teacheroso". Its symptoms are the presence of vain, arrogant men who take over the pulpit and begin to inject teachings into the bloodstream of that fellowship, which are not pure. They *look okay on the surface*, but there is a deadly virus that lurks within; and, little by little, it will kill the patient.

Dr. Paul is alarmed because the patient *feels okay*. He doesn't even know he's sick. So Dr. Timothy has *two problems*. First, he has to tell the patient that he's not as well as he thinks he is, and then he has to prescribe an immediate cure, and the cure involves surgery, and fast. This isn't easy for Tim, because confrontation isn't his *natural strength*.

He does, however, have the Great Physician to lean on, and so *his own strength is not the issue*. That's where we are in the scenario of I Timothy thus far. Paul is in Macedonia, and he is writing to his young protégé warning him not to let the nemesis of false doctrine go on any longer. The basic roots of liberalism, legalism, traditionalism, and fanaticism are all present. And to make it worse, some of the offenders are men of position who are greatly respected by the church. But what they are teaching is poison, disguised as truth. Left alone, it will destroy the body. Paul has described the offenders clearly. Now he begins to tell Tim what must be done to solve the problem, and *how the patient will look when he's really healthy*.

The cure? Surgery. Remove the malignancy.

[Tell those men] ...not to teach false doctrines any longer
(I Timothy 1:3 NIV)

They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.
(I Timothy 1:7 NIV)

Either they stop teaching those lies immediately, or they stop teaching immediately. It was that simple.

Now how did this thing creep into the church unawares? How does false doctrine find its way into a normally healthy body and, *without the congregation realizing it*, lure them away

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into partial truth or doctrinal bondage? We already learned the characteristics of the teachers in our last study. They were men who sought attention, wanted acclaim, were constantly the source of contention or division, always had to have something “new” to tickle the fancy of the people, and were eventually caught up in the greed that occurs when financial gain becomes a *reason for preaching* and is counted a *mark of success*.

What kind of church would let that happen? Well, it had to be a people who thrived on the same things. They sought men who elevated themselves and took pleasure in a dictatorial environment. They loved a good fight and always needed a cause to promote. They couldn't be satisfied with Christ Himself; they always had to have a new doctrinal tidbit or emotional experience. They fostered the concept that temporal blessings were indicators of spiritual success, so the more their leaders profited, and the more their fame grew, the more they assumed God was blessing them. The problem was that *in their zeal to be successful, they had forgotten how to define success*.

Success is not found in new, exciting doctrines. It is not found in great growth or prosperity. It is not found in boastful leaders. Success is found in the heart. When God's people are developing certain basic characteristics, God's church is healthy. And when God's church is healthy, *it will be a success by God's standards*. And that's all that matters.

But mark it down, any church that begins to operate on God's principles will be a candidate for this disease. Success breeds the pitfalls that lead to failure. And whenever a church dares to walk the line God's way, the enemy begins his subtle, but deadly attacks from within. You will not see them, except with the eyes of the Spirit, but they will be there. And if you wait until the symptoms surface, *much of the damage will already have been done*.

So Paul carefully writes down for Timothy the antidote for a proud, legalistic, self-promoting ministry.

The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

(I Timothy 1:5 NIV)

DR. PAUL'S PRESCRIPTION

Paul's prescription is so simple sounding, it would be easy to

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overlook. Yet in its utter simplicity lies its incredible power. He uses words that have been so oversimplified in our day, that they no longer mean anything. He is talking about things like love and faith and purity and sincerity. Those things no longer say much to us; but to that young man whose task it was to take an erring flock and reconstruct their way, those words meant everything, because Paul was, in no uncertain terms, redefining spirituality.

The measuring stick of their success would no longer be *how well they kept the law*, or *how many doctrines they could invent*. The new yardstick had to do with the heart—the hearts of the leadership first, then, the hearts of the people; and that ultimately would make up the heart of the body at large, the church. There would be one primary plumb line that would tell whether or not that part of the body of Christ was, *in reality, infused with the life of God*. It would not be its size, its number of converts, nor how flamboyant or prosperous its leaders, but

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another [that's how John put it]. (John 13:35 NIV)

The church was to be made up of a family of people in love: so in love with God that they spent every possible waking moment in His Presence, and every ounce of energy yielding to His purposes. They were so in love with others who profess His Name that there was a total selflessness that pervaded their every decision. It was not *what can it do for me*. It was *what do the others need?* So the church was to become a body of transparent, honest, pure, unselfish men and women whose very lives were living testimonies of the holiness of God. The church today should be no less.

So there we have the problem and the prescription. The problem was the church had strayed from the basics. And the prescription was to return to what was important...*immediately*. What was important was a congregation full of men and women whose hearts were pure, whose motives were honest, whose consciences were clear, and whose lives were transparent. A big order, to be sure. For Paul was saying that God was not as interested *in what the church was doing*, as He was in *whom the church was reflecting*.

Were visitors to that Ephesian flock sensing a total atmosphere of honesty? a total commitment to purity? a genuine unselfishness of ministry? If not, they were not witnessing the church of Jesus Christ as it was meant to be seen. They were seeing a sick body

masquerading as though it were ready for the Olympics. And they would be able to tell the difference.

This is serious business. This is the church defined. This is the Mind of Christ as it looks when it inhabits His Body. This is Christ in human form in the real world. And it is held up by the hand of Paul as the pattern by which not only those Ephesians, but we who claim to hold the banner of our God high today ought to reflect as well. Let's examine these words, one by one, and see if we can measure our own lives and the lives of our churches by the standard Paul asked Timothy to use.

The Goal is Love

He begins, "The goal of this command is love." The reason for our existence as a church and the reason for the Ephesians' existence was to: a) experience the love of Christ personally, and b) to demonstrate the love of Christ practically. Until we've done the first, we can't do the second. But the world is full of men and women who profess to have experienced God's love by receiving God's Son, but whose lives and whose ministries are anything but confirming portraits.

The love of God in the life of the church is a tangible expression of God's nature in everyday situations. It is hungry people fed. It is lonely people comforted. It is struggling people encouraged. It is an atmosphere that pervades the very emotional climate of the fellowship. When one hurts, all hurt; when one suffers, all weep. It is a *responsive* church that seizes on ways to meet needs without even being asked. The word *love*, remember, means *God giving Himself away*. And the love of God as it is reflected in His saints is nothing less than men and women, so filled with God, that they literally give their lives away for each other, with hardly a thought about the cost. Christ was their example. He so loved that He gave and gave and gave until He gave Himself away. Do you? Do you literally *run to meet the needs of those who are hurting*? Or do you hide in the background, hoping someone else, whoever he is, will volunteer? Let me assure you that if the church of Jesus Christ in this generation were not so wrapped up in itself and in its comfort and in its reputation; if it were abandoning itself as Christ did, this world we live in would be astounded. That's how they're to know us—by *how we love the brethren*. Paul was saying, "It doesn't matter if you stop eating certain foods, or stop doing certain things, if *you don't have the*

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love of God igniting your spirit to give itself away, you are nothing. You can “speak with the tongues of men and of angels, even give your body to be burned, but if you have not love you are nothing.” Love is the aim of the commandment. The word end or aim used here was the word telos or literally the object of the instruction. The reason for it all and the expression of it all would be a heart filled with the love of God.

From a Pure Heart

But it can't be just any kind of love, either. It has to be love that issues forth from a pure heart. The word *heart* used here is the Greek word *kardia*, the word from which our English words *cardiac* and *cardiology* come. It means that which has to do with the heart. In the earliest of times, Greek thought limited the use of the word to the physical organ that pumps the blood and keeps the body alive, but Homer began to introduce a deeper thought into Greek thinking. He began to use the word to indicate the seat of human emotions. This was a familiar thought to the Hebrew mind, for God had told His children to love Him with all their hearts. And to both Hebrew and Greek, the word had also come to mean the *moral center of a man's being*. One who was immoral was said to have an evil heart. Finally, it began to mean the real person at his deepest level: mind, emotion, and will. In other words, the heart is the real you. *It is what you think when you think no one knows what you think.*

That is why,

For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. (Proverbs 23:7a NKJV)

It is what you would do were there no restraints and no consequences.

Your heart is the *real you*, with all the facade stripped away. It's the you *nobody sees but God*. That's why the Scripture has so much to say about the heart. It says:

- God knows our hearts. (Luke 16:15)
- God knows if we forgive *from our hearts*. (Matthew 18:35)
- When we pray, the Holy Spirit searches our hearts. (Romans 8:27)
- God will one day judge the secrets of our hearts. (I Corinthians 14:25)

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The heart, then, is the *real us*.

It is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;
(Jeremiah 17:9 NKJV)

That is, *even we are easily fooled into thinking we are something we really aren't*.

But God isn't fooled. He knows our hearts. He hears those hidden thoughts we think; He sees those motion pictures that run in the theatre of our minds; He clearly knows how we *would react* were no one watching. He sees our thoughts when we think we can think whatever we choose, because no one is around. *He knows*.

To lead the church of God or to be effective in the church of God, according to Paul, the heart must be *pure*. The word is (*katharos*). It means the opposite of soiled or dirty. It was used figuratively of corn that had been winnowed and cleansed of all chaff. It was used of an army that had been purged of misfits and cowards and had nothing left but battle-worthy warriors. It is what is left when the dross has been removed, and there is nothing mixed in that will defile. It is your heart (the real you) when *absolutely nothing stands between you and God*. It means all known sin has been confessed, all known ulterior motives dealt with, all arrogance relinquished, all sin repented of, and all game-playing stopped. Purity did not mean sinless perfection. It did, however, mean a deep sense of awe over the holiness of God that made *continuing in known sin enough to break your heart, because it was more than enough to break God's heart*.

And the church of Jesus Christ today no longer teaches and preaches the kind of hatred for the sins of the heart that once was so characteristic of those who possessed great spiritual power. Its emphasis vacillates from cold doctrine to warm involvement. One is *what you know*. The other is *what you do*. Both are important to God. But what means the most to God is *who you are in your heart*. Sin separates us from God's presence and alienates us from God's power, and the gospel that Dr. Paul prescribed for the church started there. The authority the church would have in its battle with the principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this age would be proportionate, not to the magnitude of its program, but to the purity of its people. The love of God flowing from a body manifesting a pure heart was Paul's first prescription. "These men," as he referred to them,

weren't preaching that or living that. They were all wrapped up in doctrinal hassles that rang their intellectual bells and made them authorities because they were the only ones with the answers; but they *didn't change the course of history because they didn't focus on the man within*. Paul told them to stop it.

A Good Conscience

But, of course, that pure heart has to be coupled with a *good conscience*. The word *good* literally means *that which is basically not marred*. The word *conscience* comes from two words *syn* meaning *with* and *eidesis* meaning *to know*. So it literally means *to know with*. It is comparing two things for the sake of setting a standard and meeting approval. So a good conscience is one that allows you to look into the mirror and, then looking into the mirror of the Word, reconcile what you see. It means that, so far as you can determine *at that moment*, your life has been brought into harmony with God's purposes. If you have a pure heart, you can determine the difference. And at that moment, if there is something between you and God, or something between you and your mate, or you and your children, or you and your boss, or even between you and your worst enemy that *has not been made right*, you are driven by your conscience to do *so to make the image in the mirror reflect the image in the Word*. That's what the Scripture means when it says,

When you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,

Leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.
(Matthew 5:23,24 NKJV)

A clear conscience is an essential to walking in the Spirit. You cannot totally separate a pure heart from a clear conscience. To have one you must have the other, but they are not exactly the same. So Paul differentiates between the two, so Timothy could understand how *vital* a clear conscience is to right doctrine. Paul was saying *before you go into the pulpit to expound your latest doctrinal tidbit*, get alone before God and stay there until your heart has been purified and your conscience is clear: deal with besetting sins and deal with offenses that need reconciliation.

And a Genuine Faith

Finally, Paul says, "Tim, this love that flows from a pure heart

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that is characterized by a clear conscience *must be the result of a genuine faith.*" The word *genuine* or *unfeigned* as the King James Bible puts it, comes from the word *hupokrinomai*, the word from which our word *hypocrite* stems. It was used of an actor on a stage; one who assumes a role, but that isn't the *real him*. If your faith, your walk with God, isn't what you *pretend it to be in public*, you're not fit to espouse the latest doctrinal truth as an expert. God isn't after experts. God is after clean hearts, clear consciences, and sincere, transparent lives that demonstrate that life by giving themselves away. Anything less than that is less than what God wants and is not a solid foundation from which to lead the church.

The primary truth behind all this, then, is that the church ought to stop looking for experts and start looking for holiness. It ought to be careful not to use talent as a substitute for sincerity. It ought to never, under any circumstances, accept prestige in place of purity. In selecting leadership or in maintaining ministries, the issue is the heart. A church filled with pure hearts will have power, *whether it has talent or not*. A church filled with transparent lives will have a ministry, *whether it has numbers or not*. A church filled with men and women whose consciences have been honed to a level of sensitivity in harmony with God's desires will build relationships, whether it has been schooled in the latest techniques or not.

The church is not a factory that produces spirituality. The church is a vessel *through which flow the love and the power of God Himself*. Whatever blocks that flow of power or contaminates that outpouring of love prevents God from being in the marketplace what He wants to be, and thus prevents the lives of those being touched from being changed.

Dr. Paul has a prescription. It is not easy medicine to take. It requires a thorough examination of the heart, *the real you*, perhaps by spending a day alone in His presence, allowing Him to search every thought, every motive, every plan. Then it may well involve traumatic surgery, the cutting away of some area of your life that is contaminating the bloodstream and poisoning the life. Tough medicine. But a definite cure for what ails the church of Jesus Christ today, and it is the same thing that ailed the church at Ephesus in 65 A.D. — *sin*.

God help us to make an appointment right now to see the

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Great Physician, and God help us to submit to the cure. We live in perilous times—times that need a church filled with awesome power. So did the Ephesians. God gave them a prescription for a sound spiritual body. It wasn't easy, but it was necessary. Praise God, it's a refillable prescription.

Dear God, help us to take it now!

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