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"Discontent: When Theology Becomes Pathology"

1 Timothy 6:3-10

³ If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, ⁴ he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

⁶ Now there *is* great gain in godliness with contentment, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. (ESV)

You've heard some of this before, haven't you? Once again, Paul is going on about sound doctrine, and about the danger of those teaching a different doctrine. Why does he repeat himself?

My wife drives a Toyota. That's a name you're hearing over and over again. In the last couple of weeks they've had a number of model recalls, and of course recalls can be deadly for a company.

One of the things that was learned in the recall that stands as the gold-standard of recalls – the great Tylenol recall of 1982 where someone changed the product in Chicago by lacing it with cyanide – was a 4- step program to get you through the crisis. Proctor & Gamble came up with this process, and it's one everyone now follows: First, you identify the crisis, second you apologize, third you describe what you are going to do to make sure this doesn't happen again, and finally, you follow through and do it. In the case of Toyota, you may have to make like shampoo, and wash, rinse and repeat, when after troubles with accelerators, you have troubles with brakes, and so on.

One of the reasons Paul is repeating himself is that he is involved in something like a recall. This is a message recall – because there are people out there teaching a message that could kill. And he has to put the brakes on it.

This morning we want to look at:

- The **Motivation** of those that Change the Message
- The process of **Detection** where you know the message has been tampered with
- The **Salvation** message restated

- First, the **Motivation** of those that Change the Message

Let's again reset ourselves in Paul's context: When Paul writes to Timothy, he's concerned about a dynamic that has infiltrated the church at Ephesus. And this dynamic had both a form and a content.

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The form looked something like this. We've just seen in the last four or five weeks how Paul is helping Timothy to ramp up quickly on leadership in the church. He gives Timothy instruction on what elders should be like, and he gives Timothy further instruction on what the deacons should be like. In fact, he gives Timothy instruction on how the whole *family* – the whole church family – should behave with one another. Why? Because there was a sense of urgency. The gospel was spreading so fast that some of its new purveyors were combining it with easy and available cultural forms – assimilating those forms into the message, or over-contextualizing the message *to* those forms – so that Christians were not just going into the world with this message, but they and the message were becoming *OF* the world. The message was being changed. Sometimes intentionally.

Look, in those days, one of the most popular forms of entertainment were a group of travelling speakers called the sophists. These were men – they were all men as far as I can tell – who made it their business to "sell" philosophy. Since there is nothing new under the sun, what we could compare them to is a combination of movie star, Mad Men (advertising men) and politicians. The Greeks loved a good speaker. They invented great oration. They loved drama. And they loved the creative-sell – where a smooth and dramatic speaker could turn the sow's ear into the silk purse. One of these sophists – a guy named Adrian – was so famous that when he came to town, the senate shut down and the circus couldn't sell tickets because everyone in town would have wanted to hear this guy speak. The sophists were a kind of combination of John Stewart, Oprah Winfrey and Will Rogers.

What would they talk about? We have examples! Some would set up an argument. Here's a real example: A man goes to a town to kill a tyrant who has been oppressing and grinding down the people – that's always been an attractive story to capture people's minds. So the man enters the citadel – the fortress – to assassinate this man but not finding the tyrant himself, he kills the son of the tyrant. The tyrant comes back to the fortress and finds his son dead, with a sword in his body. In his grief and guilt for not protecting his son, he grabs the sword and kills himself.

The man – the assassin – then claims the reward for killing the tyrant and bringing liberty back to the people. But as a murderer of the son, should he receive it? Entertainment, speculation, AND competition – sophists trying to outdo other sophists. Now why would Paul bring up this sophistry? Because the form had entered the church. Timothy needed to appoint godly elders who loved the Lord because the church was now *full* of wandering prophet-sophists, you see. People were mixing the Christian message, the gospel story, and even Jesus' parables into a stirring presentation that would lead to riches and prestige for the speaker, but a false, mistaken and misleading message for the listener. And again, it led to entertainment, speculation, AND competition. False teachers trying to outdo one another. Look at verses 4 and 5: This kind of teacher "is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain." So that is the form of the teaching that became such a problem. The very same dynamic that plagued the sophists was now in the church.

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What about the content? What about the teaching? Well, Paul was concerned about a particular kind of heresy – a particular kind of false teaching. Now at this time, this teaching didn't yet have a name, but this was a teaching that would later be called Gnosticism. Right here, you could say, it's in its formative state. Paul is dealing with something you might call proto-Gnosticism. Gnosticism is still around. If you look at eastern religions, they all tend to see matter, the physical, and often even the body as an illusion. Illusory – because you see, this *world* is an illusion. It's the *spiritual* that is reality. That is how eastern religions deal with decay and death. This is how they give hope – they teach that the stuff of this world is illusory so that when things get old, fade away and die, well it shouldn't matter that much – this world is an illusion.

Now these Gnostics taught that if the physical is decaying and fading away, then so is the world. So they taught that God – who they agreed was spirit and was eternal – did not create this world. Why would he create something that was dying? The same with the body. The body is illusory, too.

Now you may think, why bother or think about – and certainly, why worry – about Gnosticism and any kind of false teaching that sounds like it today?

Well think about some of these teachings, and ask yourself if any of these have hung around:

The Gnostics taught that you could leave your body. That you could transcend it. They taught that you could create your own reality. Like the Police song, "We are spirits in the material world..." The idea is that you should not let your body stop you from being who and where you want to be. (I don't know about you, but I feel like I've just seen this movie with a pair of funny-looking 3-D glasses on a couple of weeks ago). It's very American, right? *You* get to decide what is real. The spirit is good, and the body is confining, and will only hold you back.

The Gnostics also taught that your gender and your sexual preference have nothing to do with your body. The body, in other words, should not have any influence on how we express ourselves sexually. The body should never be determinative of who you are – what is really important are your *feelings*.

Here is the ultimate teaching: You can't know God, they taught, through the bible, through truth claims, through arguments or evidence. No, the way to know God is through a spark of the divine in you. God is not "out there" or knowable through what he has done or created, where men are without excuse. No, you find god "in here." Not "in here" as in the body. But "in here" as in the soul - by getting in touch with yourself. Sound familiar?

This is why Paul will remind Timothy that the Spirit – the REAL Spirit – expressly teaches that in later times, some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of... liars... who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving... For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God..."

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Why those things? Why did these false teachers pounce on some foods? Why marriage? Well, marriage was thought to require sex as consummation, and for Christians, that consummation was a good thing. That the body is good! But the Gnostics taught that the body was bad. And staying away from certain foods would imply that some food was bad, also. And so some Christian teachers that were running around as Gnostics-sophists – taught a sort of asceticism where you avoided all of these practices.

BUT, there was another group who took this teaching and ran in *another* direction. They went to the other extreme: if the body is bad or unimportant, do whatever you want with it! *Satisfy* your appetites. God wants to prosper your feelings, your emotions, your wallet – so self-indulge! It doesn't make any difference!

It's a prosperity gospel, Paul said, that tries to turn "godliness" into "a means of gain." You could pursue pleasures and riches and wealth – and this would be godly at the same time. And this sort of teaching always makes the teacher, the prophet, the sophist, the preacher, wealthy as well. Religion has always been big business.

So that's the context, the motivation of these teachers. The love of money, baptized as a good thing – godliness – and godliness is gain!

- Detection

So how do you detect false teachers? You see, the sophists – and therefore the false-teaching Christian version of the sophist – were such good speakers, so good with words and so slick, that you could easily be pulled in. How was one to distinguish the teachers of truth from the false teachers?

Paul says it's actually VERY simple. Verse 3: "If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing." If you're going to have the ability to detect if a teacher has the right motivation and is true, their teaching must be expressly Christological. It has to be Christ-centered. Did you see that?

Why this focus on Christ? Why didn't Paul say, "If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of God and the teaching that accords with godliness," or "the teaching of the scriptures," or "the Spirit?"

Because this centering on Christ is how you detect the false-teachers.

The Gnostics *then*, and the neo-gnostics *today* – and I hope you're already getting an idea about the present day Gnostics – these teachers have always avoided, dismissed, or even rejected the resurrection. Because the gospel that focuses on Jesus who was a *man* as well as God, Jesus who came in the flesh, and was conceived in a real human womb.... Who suffered and died on a cross that was not an illusion, but whose death really accomplished something – redemption and atonement FROM sin – whose physical body was buried in a real tomb and then was raised from the dead – not just his spirit, but his body – this is the Jesus who gives eternal life.

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This, Paul says, is what must be taught for the teacher to be a sound teacher. That the physical IS good. Here is something the false prophets don't teach – that the resurrected Jesus ate a real fish, and has real wounds, even still, in his resurrected body. The resurrection means – among so many things – that God LIKES the body. That he saves the body as well as the soul.

That is your detection system. Does this teacher tell me that the resurrection is absolutely critical to the message of the gospel. Do they preach Christ crucified for sin, AND raised bodily in the resurrection?

We have to go on – but I want to suggest that the church is in the process of "message recalls" all the time. You know, a lot of churches don't have the very elders that Paul insists we need. Just last week I heard a man who some refer to as "America's Pastor" being interviewed by Anderson Cooper on CNN about the disaster in Haiti. And his overall message was that we can't know why God allowed this to happen, but that God is in control and God has a plan for each and every person's life.

Now that's true. But a Muslim can say that Allah is in control of your life, that Allah is sovereign, and that he has a plan for your life. The true Christian teacher must put the question of why a sovereign God would allow his own son to suffer, be crushed and die... for sinners... and to raise these sinners up with his son. Does the message have the cross and the resurrection? Remember, that's our detection system.

You see, the message that God is sovereign – and of course, he is – or the message that we are spiritual and God is a spirit, will not make you passionate to see people saved from the rubble of Haiti. You'll know that you should. But the gospel means that Christians *fight* when it comes to matter. It's why Christians should be the greenest people there are. But it also means that when we see people who are naked who need clothes, or people that are cold and need shelter, or people who are wounded and need healing, we are there.

As Tim Keller will say, "We know it is part of God's kingdom program for us to be a witness to his healing power. You can't meditate or think your way out of homelessness, poverty or pain. They need to be healed. People need resurrection.

- **Now finally, Salvation restated.**

Starting at verse 6, Paul says some pretty interesting and relevant things about how many of US are motivated. You see, each one of us is a potential false teacher. We are always teaching ourselves, because we are always preaching to our OWN hearts. We preach to ourselves moment by moment about what is good for us, and what will redeem a bad day, or what we need to save a certain situation or relationship. But is what you are preaching to yourself good and true and healthy, or is it bad, false and hurtful? You see, we can preach theology – thoughts about the true God – or we can preach to ourselves *pathology* – something diseased and false. In v. 3 we're told that what we teach has to be according to the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ. That word, "sound," means "to be in good health." To put it another way, healthy words or teaching that gives you life has to be according to Jesus. This is contrasted with verse 4, and "the *unhealthy* craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy..."

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So what is it we preach to ourselves most often? That we need something else to become content. Do you see what Paul is doing? It's very subtle. False teachers were teaching falsely because by doing so they could turn a profit. Christianity was being changed, tweaked and repackaged to bring in the money. Now it WAS false teaching – they taught that through morality, YOU could have financial security, but their real sin was the sin underneath that teaching, and that sin is avarice. Greed. Paul says that, "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs."

But he turns his mirror on us. In verses 6, 7, and 8, he starts to use the word "we." "There *is* great **gain** in godliness with contentment," he says, "for *we* brought nothing into the world, and *we* cannot take anything out of the world. But if *we* have food and clothing, with these *we* will be content."

What's he up to? He is catching us before we start to preach the gospel of wealth to ourselves. And what happens when we do? We are pierced with many pangs. The getting, you see, the consuming, the buying, begets more desire, more consuming, more buying. Because a lot of us say we love God, but really, we love money. We say we love God, but when it comes down to it, it's MONEY that controls us.

Here is how it works. Christianity, for many of us in this room, is an investment strategy. If we love God, God will take care of us. But how do we measure how much God loves us? By how much we have materially. And the truth is, we itch for more stuff far more than we have pangs for more of God.

Friends, Christianity is not an investment strategy. You will love God, and use money, or you will love money, and use God. It's one or the other.

We spend money we don't have on things we don't need to impress people we don't like. And we're not content! Because our identity is tied to stuff we don't like and need rather than being tied to Christ.

God is working on me on this one. Ethan keeps asking me if he can have my car when I die, my books when I die, my shirts when I die. I am being reminded an awful lot that...I'm gonna die! It kinda weirded me out at first, but you know, v.7 says it: You can't take it with you. This stuff is good. The physical IS good, right? But God will never allow it to own you because it's not who you are. He won't let you take that stuff with you.

Imagine the rapture being something like musical chairs: You know, suddenly the music and clamor of life stops – we all see Jesus descending – and like people running for chairs, we all grab our plasma big-screen TVs and your x-box and your wiis, and you say "okay Lord, NOW I'm ready!"

This sounds absurd, but this is how some of us think! As if that stuff is what we're really going to need to be happy in heaven. As if that stuff is going to save us from boredom in glory... how weird is that?

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ohn Stott says that "possessions are the travelling luggage of time, they are not the stuff of eternity. So travel light."

It comes down to this. Who will you love? God or mammon? Some of us want to be rich. We watch shows about it. WE want to marry the millionaire. WE will eat the snake meat on *Survivor* to get rich. WE want to become the American idol to become rich and famous.

Now there's nothing against being rich. The bible presumes that some Christians will be rich. Rich Christians are good. It's rich LIVING Christians, and riches FOCUSED Christians that are bad. Notice that it's not people who are rich that fall into this trap of destruction, but people who want to be richer than they already are. Because rich-living and riches-focused Christians are always going to have a problem with holiness. Because you can't love God and money. You have to pick a team. Rich in Christ, which is eternal – or rich in stuff, which you can't take with you?

Now some have complained about this verse. How is the love of money the root of ALL evil? The problem here is that the verse is misquoted from the original, and mistranslated in the King James Version. What you have here is correct: "the love of money is *a* root of *all kinds* of evils." If anything, *pride* is the root of ALL evil – the desire to unseat God. But that pride – the power that we want – is often, if not always, tied to money. It just is. You know, you can even use pride to say "I have less money," and love *that!* You'll say, "look at those Christians who have so much money, but I am *more* Christlike. I am the poor Christ speaks about."

St. John Chrysostom said, "Take away the love of money, and you put an end to war, to battle, to enmity, to strife and contention."

See money is not bad on its own. Money is the root of ministry quite often. Money is the root of having the parking lot plowed. Money is the root of hoagies for lunch. But money CAN be the root of all kinds of evil. It's not for nothing that when things go bad in government, what do good reporters say? Follow the money! Money is a magnifying glass on your heart. It is an amplifier on your desires. It makes things bigger and louder. Money is steroids for your lusts.

So you can seek after God with money, or seek after evil with money. Whatever you do, you can be sure that that is where your heart has gone. Because where your treasure is... that is where your heart is.

What is scary is the pursuit of money – and let me be clear, holding back on what you owe God IS the pursuit of money, so we're not talking about people "out there," but people right here, too – some people who pursue money "have wandered away from the faith." When Christ is not the central desire or love of your life, something else WILL be. You've chosen your team. You've chosen your master. Ananias and Sapphira made that decision. Paul will mention Demas in 2 Timothy who deserted him when he fell in love with things of this present world.

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Friends, if you're not content with what you have, you are NOT going to be content with what you want, either. You just won't. Discontent always wants more and more. In fact Paul says in verse 10, that you will end up being your own tormenter. Instead of relying on and living in Christ, who pierced himself for your transgression, you'll end up in the sorry place of piercing yourself for your transgressions.

Find out where you are. Look in your wallet, look at your checkbook, check out your bank statement. Ask yourself, do I love God, or do I love money? It's a radically simple GPS of the heart. It will give you an inventory. You may have to do a heart-recall, because your bank account might tell you that your heart is off the map. That you're wandering. Don't do this without prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you. Ask the Holy Spirit to direct your giving. Christ WAS pierced for you, and now he gives you everything you need.

Let's pray.