

## “The church rekindled – 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy”

September 11, 2022



### God calls us to worship:

Responsive reading: Psalm 47

Hymn: #681 “We have heard a joyful sound”

### We respond in praise, confession, and supplication:

Prayers of Praise and supplication (*Please remain standing*):

Prayers of Confession (*Please be seated; said in unison*):

**Merciful God,  
we confess that we have sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed.  
We have not loved you  
with our whole heart, mind, and strength;  
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.  
In your mercy  
forgive what we have been,  
amend what we are,  
and direct what we shall be,  
so that we may delight in your will  
and walk in your ways,  
to the glory of your holy name.  
Amen.**

Assurance of grace:

(The response to: “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good” is: “**His love endures forever.**”)

**God speaks to us:**

Unison prayer for illumination: *See back cover of bulletin.*

**Living God,  
to turn away from you is to fall  
and to turn towards you is to rise.  
By the power of your Spirit,  
reform your church  
and help us to hear your word  
in ways that we will understand it truly;  
so that in understanding we may trust fully;  
and that in trusting we may follow you always.  
Give us, dear God,  
your help in all our responsibilities;  
your guidance in all our uncertainties;  
and your wisdom in all our discerning.  
Where we are corrupt, purify us.  
Where we are in error, direct us.  
Where we are divided, reunite us.  
And use your church to your glory  
and the service of your people,  
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> A prayer for the church from the writings of the Reformers.

### In the household of God

Three of the letters in the New Testament are addressed to particular pastors of Christian congregations and are concerned with the internal life and governance of Christian churches as well as the behaviour of the members thereof. They are known collectively as the Pastoral Epistles: 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy and Titus.

We are now in the latter portion of the season of Pentecost during which we're invited to reflect on, remember, and live into what it means to be a congregation of Christ's church; a member of the household of God, indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

We're also at the beginning of a new season of school and extracurricular activities.

Thus, it is a fitting time to be reminded of what is Christ's church and, with God's help, rekindle our Christian life and witness.

To that end, today we begin a new sermon series in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy which I'm calling "The church rekindled" that will take us, with a couple of exceptions, from now until the start of Advent.

READ 1<sup>ST</sup> TIMOTHY 1:1-20; 3:14-16.

(The response to: "This is the word of the Lord" is: "**Thanks be to God.**")

*The letter's purpose:*

The letter begins with identifying the sender, Paul, as an apostle of Christ Jesus *by the command of God*.

This is important to note because it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that the New Testament letters, or for that matter the Old Testament books of Moses (Genesis – Deuteronomy), or the prophets, or the histories, aren't as relevant for the church today as are, for instance, the gospels. In the gospels we have recorded the words of Jesus himself whereas in the letters we have merely the thoughts of particular pastors.

That God commanded Paul and named him an apostle means that he has been granted the authority to shape the church in Christ's name.

Now, on his own merit, Paul had no such authority.

Apart from the grace of Christ, Paul was a violent, hate filled, murderous man who was intent on purging Christians from the face of the earth! He was the

champion of the first persecution against Christians. As they stoned Stephen to death, Paul held their cloaks so they could better throw their rocks! Of all the sins listed in verses 9 and 10, Paul was the chief sinner!

And yet, “the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” and Paul became an energetic church planter, champion of the gospel for Gentiles as well as Jews, and an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God.

Which means that his letters are just as important for the church to know as are the gospels, the psalms, the proverbs, the Old Testament histories, and the books of Moses.

Which brings us to Paul’s purpose in writing this letter.

Timothy was one of Paul’s co-workers. We get the sense their relationship was as mentor and mentee – Paul referred to Timothy as “my loyal child”, seeing himself as Timothy’s father in the faith.

Paul had planted the church in Ephesus and, after 3 years, left Timothy to carry on the gospel ministry there.

As the church grew and developed, other teachers who also held leadership roles in the Ephesian church were trying to teach the Law, yet they were taking as their prime resources popular stories and ideas (what Paul called “myths and genealogies”) and then were bending God’s Word to fit the common thought.

Any decision we make as Christians involves discerning the faithful interpretation and application of scripture. Whether it be about marriage, relationships, eldership, cannabis-use, or Physician Assisted Suicide.

An interesting example of this is our cherished teaching concerning infant baptism.

This has been the practice of Reformed and Catholic churches for centuries. In a time when infant fatalities were high, people wanted to know their babies were indwelt by God’s Spirit and enveloped in His love. So, the church developed rich theologies which draw on the covenantal system (which is God’s primary mode of operation), and God’s multi-generational promises, and parent’s duties to raise their families in the faith in order to support the popular desire to baptize infants as soon as possible.

But there is little scriptural basis for this practice!

Christian baptisms, in the Bible, are the privilege of those who can publicly profess their own faith in Christ. (With a few exceptions in which entire families were baptized.)

Just as the PCC has upheld infant baptism not as a flagrant disregard of scriptures, but as an attempt to teach about the love of God, I don't think these teachers to whom Paul referred, were maliciously ignoring the scriptures and leading the church astray. In fact, Paul was careful to point out that "they *desired* to be teachers of the law." However, they were misguided and the result of their teaching was that they were misrepresenting the scriptures, which meant they were misrepresenting Jesus, and thus were leading the church astray.

So, Paul wrote this letter to encourage Timothy, and the faithful who called him pastor, to not be swayed.

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*What is of great importance for the church – and that which is Paul's chief concern in this letter – is that the members of the household of God adhere to sound doctrine concerning the use of Scripture, the person and work of Christ, and "how one ought to behave in the household of God."*

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For the remainder of this sermon, I want to outline two primary reasons why doctrine, or teaching, is so important (one which affects us individually and the other affects our mission as the church) and then look at three fields in which sound doctrine plays.

*The reasons:*

1. Doctrine that "conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God" transcends our present, yet momentary, circumstances.

What I mean by that, is that at any given moment we might be tired, anxious, fearful, or frustrated. There may well be legitimate reasons for these feelings. These are real emotions brought about by real circumstances.

As members of the household of God, we needn't be controlled by our circumstances. We are led by our Holy Spirit-driven consciences which, when applied, are shaped by our faith in the gospel that we have inherited the grace, mercy, and peace of the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Messiah!

That is true regardless of our circumstances, by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we then apply our faith to our circumstance, we do so by reminding ourselves of the sound teaching of the gospel. That God is real, good, and able. Of who Jesus is and what he's done and is doing for us, in our place, and on our behalf. Of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit within us. We believe it to be true. And we respond to our circumstance according to the doctrine, not the feeling.

Doctrine shapes our conscience; what we are taught shapes what we know to be right and wrong, so that when we engage our faith we will rightly discern the holy course of action regardless of our circumstances.

Doctrine that "conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God" forms a solid foundation for practical faith that withstands our changing emotions and circumstances.

So, doctrine matters for the good of our mental, emotional, and physical health.

**2.** The church is the household of the living God and thus represents Him in the world. We bear the name of Jesus Christ. Wherever we go, in our actions and encounters, we represent the living and triune God. The doctrine to which we adhere enables us to represent God either falsely or truthfully. We either misrepresent God, or we glorify Him according to what we are taught and what we hold to be true.

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*Doctrine matters for the good of our souls and the glory of God.*

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*The fields of play:*

Paul identified three fields in which sound doctrine plays:

**(i)** The use of the Law.

*We know that the Law is good if one uses it legitimately.*

I don't think it is a terribly shocking statement to say that human beings are born into a sinful state. We are divinely loved, yet sinful. I say this not as a judgment but simply as an observation. At the core of sin is selfishness, and new-born babies are inherently selfish.

We love new-borns. We are awed by them. Yet all they know is what they need and that we exist to satisfy their needs at any time of day or night: “Feed me. Change me. Hug me.”

We are born selfish.

Left uncorrected, we continue in that state.

But, through the influence of parents, teachers, pastors, and experience, many of us are taught to develop empathy and compassion. But we need help to do so. We need knowledge of boundaries. We need teaching about what is right and what is wrong. We need doctrine that shapes in us good, Godly consciences.

Because God is the author of all that is good and holy, God is the author of what is right.

Hence, the law.

For Paul, the Law would have included the books of Moses (Genesis → Deuteronomy), the histories, the proverbs, prophets, and psalms. For us it includes all of that together with the gospels, the Revelation, and the letters of the New Testament.

The law is good, if one uses it legitimately.

This means understanding that the law is laid down not to oppress but to bring us into a life that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God!

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*The Law – the Old and New Testaments; the Bible – is the curriculum of divine training whereby the Lord brings us from sin-filled infancy to holy maturity by shaping within us a pure heart (focussed on Christ and His kingdom), a good conscience (knowledge of Godly courses of action), and a sincere faith (the ability to apply doctrine to our circumstances.)*

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So, the members of the household of God need to know the Scriptures. Old and New Testament alike.

**(ii)** The person and work of Christ.

Three times in this letter Paul proclaimed creedal statements, one of which is:

*“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”  
(1:15)*

All those vices catalogued in verses 9 and 10, Paul himself as a living example of the foremost of all sinners, it is for these that Christ Jesus came into the world. He came to bring us from our uncorrected, sinful infancy into holy maturity.

We come to Jesus just as we are, but we don't *stay* as we are.

Jesus came to sanctify us.

He came to rescue us by his cross and transform us by the Spirit speaking through Scriptures to purify our hearts, rectify our consciences, and to solidify our faiths so that we would become the image-bearers of divine love we're meant to be.

He is more than a teacher, more than a miracle worker.

He is the Saviour.

If we're to continue being the church we must hold fast to the sound doctrine taught in the Old and New Testament concerning the person and work of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God:

*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. (1:15)*

*For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all. (2:5, 6a)*

*He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory. (3:16)*

**(iii)** How one ought to behave in the household of God.

In the rest of the letter, Paul addressed topics such as acceptable public worship of God, the governance of Christ's church – elders, deacons, bishops, and proper relations and duties towards one another within individual families and within the Christian fellowship.

We'll talk more about this over the coming weeks.

*Conclusion:*

So, for the good of our souls, and for the glory of God, let those who are members of the household of God fight the good fight of faith and take care that our behaviour is based on sound doctrine about the sacred Scriptures and the person and work of the Saviour Jesus, the Christ, who is our heart, our strength, and our mind. Amen.

Hymn: #690 "Fight the good fight"



## **We respond in thanksgiving, intercession, and faith:**

Prayers:

“Eternal God, before you all generations rise up and fall away, and in your grace, you provide leaders to serve and comfort us with wisdom and dedication. We give thanks for the life, Christian witness and service of Queen Elizabeth, whose earthly life is now ended and who has entered into the joy and peace you have prepared through Jesus Christ. We pray for her family and those who will take up her duties and responsibilities. Send your Holy Spirit to comfort and give peace to all who mourn her death and the death of any loved one.”<sup>2</sup>

Ever seeking God,  
we come before you in prayer,  
for you have sought us out and claimed us as your own.  
Thank you showing us how we are precious to you  
through the life and love of Jesus Christ.  
In our prayers we name before you other precious souls and situations.  
With your Spirit, seek them out:  
God of mercy,  
**Draw near to all who need you.**

We pray for those who feel lost in life:  
those who are frightened or anxious,  
those who are struggling with addiction or mental illness,  
and those who are lonely or despairing:

*(Silent pause for 10 seconds)*

May your reassurance and comfort find them.  
God of mercy,  
**Draw near to all who need you.**

We pray for those who have wandered away:  
for those separated from their families by conflict or distance;  
for those whose relationship with the church is broken or forgotten;  
and for those who have given up on the future in despair.

*(Silent pause for 10 seconds)*

May your healing and mercy find them.  
God of mercy,  
**Draw near to all who need you.**

We pray for those who feel forgotten:  
for those who think that they are worthless or unloved;  
for those who believe that their sins are too great to forgive;  
and for those who are convinced that not even God can love them.

*(Silent pause for 10 seconds)*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://presbyterian.ca/2022/09/08/death-queen-elizabeth/>

May your love and grace find them.  
God of mercy,  
**Draw near to all who need you.**

Ever watchful God,  
you keep seeking out wandering sheep and lost coins,  
lives of all who are precious to you.  
Thank you for your attentive love  
and your patient compassion for us all.  
May we rejoice with you when any lost soul is embraced,  
and never substitute our judgment of them for yours.  
Make us servants of the mercy we meet in Jesus Christ  
Who taught us to pray together:

**The Lord's Prayer**

Hymn: #342 "All who the name of Jesus bear"

**God sends us with God's blessing:**

Benediction

Congregation sings "Amen"