

(1 Timothy) the Priority of the Spiritual Perspective

by Brian Brodersen

Brian Brodersen emphasizes the importance of spiritual leadership and accountability in the church as outlined in 1 Timothy.

Duration: 53:27

Scripture: Luke 10:7, Ephesians 6:5, 1 Timothy 5:17, 1 Timothy 6:1-2, Hebrews 4:13

Topics: "Spiritual Perspective", "Servanthood"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher highlights the dedication and hard work of Alexander McLaren, a renowned preacher from the 1800s. McLaren's commitment to studying and preaching the Word of God is emphasized, as he would even put on work boots to symbolize the labor involved in his preparation. The sermon also discusses the relevance of the Word of God, stating that it is always applicable, despite the sinful condition of humanity. The concept of judgment is brought up, explaining that breaking God's law leads to guilt, shame, and a sense of impending judgment. The importance of discussing judgment with others in a respectful and matter-of-fact manner is emphasized. The sermon concludes by referencing the Apostle Paul's teachings on servanthood and the need for believers to honor and serve their masters, as a way to demonstrate their faith.

Transcript

Let's open together to 1st Timothy chapter 5, as we are approaching the end of this epistle of Paul to Timothy, picking up in verse 17 tonight. We covered verses 17 all the way down through 22 in our previous study, but just to backtrack just a little bit to sort of make the connection between our previous study. Paul, of course, as we've mentioned many times, is addressing issues that pertain to the life of the church.

Timothy is there in Ephesus, and it's the early stages of the life of the church, the ministry of the church, and so there are a lot of practical things that need to be addressed, and so Paul is giving Timothy instruction, and then Timothy, of course, will impart this to other leaders so that they will know how to conduct themselves in the church of God. So he says in verse 17, he says, Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. Now, we pointed out in a previous study that the elders and the pastors are the same people.

They're synonymous terms, so he's making reference to those who are leading the church, and he refers to those who rule well, ruling well. Paul, in writing to Timothy here, he says, Timothy, I'm writing these things so that you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ. You know, good leaders are a great blessing to God's people.

Bad leaders are a curse, and unfortunately, the church has had its fair share of bad leaders, and God's people historically have had, unfortunately, their fair share of bad leaders. You think about the history of the people of Israel, and, you know, you can go all the way back. You can look at Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of course, great examples with them, and then you come down to Moses and Joshua and some great leadership there.

You go through the time of the judges. Things got a little bit dodgy there during the judges' era. And then you come into Samuel, a great leader, but then Saul comes after Samuel, and, you know, Saul ended up being really a curse on the people, but then God raises up David, and David, for the most part, is a real blessing.

But then David sins, and so his son Solomon comes to the throne, and then Solomon does well for a while, but then he sins, and so the kingdom is split in two. And then as you follow the history of the two nations, the nations divided between Israel now and Judah, in the history of Israel, they never have a good king in their entire history. Jeroboam becomes the king immediately following Solomon's reign, and all the way through to the very end, the northern kingdom never has a good leader.

The kingdom of Judah has a number of good leaders, but it's a mixed thing, because there are a fair number of bad leaders as well. And you can go on and on, and you find that so often, as the leadership goes, so the people go, because people are sheep, and they follow. They follow the leaders.

That's why it's so important to have good leaders in the church. And so Paul refers to those who rule well, those who love God, those who love the people of God, those who are genuinely concerned and committed to taking care of God's flock. Those are the ones that Paul says, count them worthy of double honor.

Now, the double honor here is actually a reference to compensating them financially. And Paul then goes on, and he quotes from the Old Testament, from the book of Deuteronomy. He says, you shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.

And he then secondly quotes from Jesus, the laborer is worthy of his wages. And God has designed it that those who preach the gospel are to live from the gospel as well. Now, of course, we can find many examples of where that has been abused.

And that's not just a new phenomena with televangelism. It's something that's gone on throughout the long history of the church. But we have to be careful not to overreact.

Sometimes in a reaction to a bad situation, people go to the complete other end of the spectrum. So they would say, well, people are abusing the situation over here financially. And so they swing all the way over here and said, you know, we're not going to support anybody at all.

And that's not the place to go with it. You need to come into that biblical balance. And so those who rule well are to be counted worthy of double honor.

But notice he refers to those who labor in the word and doctrine, laboring in the word and doctrine. The position of teacher in the church is really an exalted position. It's a blessed position.

And those who are taught, Paul says to the Galatians, are to share in all good things with those who teach them. The teacher is a vitally important position within the Christian church. Because, of course, our lives center around the word of God and understanding the word of God.

And that's why we're to give honor and respect to those who teach us the word of God, those who labor in it. And I want you to notice for just a moment that word labor. Those who teach the Bible are to make it their goal to teach it well.

And in order to do that, you must labor in the word. Paul will later on in the second epistle to Timothy, he will say to Timothy, he'll say, Timothy, be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a workman, a workman, a laborer. The implication is that those who teach the word are those who, first of all, labor in the word.

They work hard at it. There was a great preacher from Manchester, England, back in the 1800s. His name was Alexander McLaren.

And he has an excellent series of sermons all the way through the Bible. And Alexander McLaren took his preaching and teaching ministry so seriously that he would get up early every morning and he would put on literally a pair of work boots. Now, he wouldn't go out and work in those work boots in the sense of going out and laboring, but he put those work boots on as he headed into his study to prepare from the word of God because he saw that as labor.

He saw that as intense, hard work. And when you read his sermons, you can see that he definitely put some intense labor into his preparation because they're great messages relevant to us here 150 years later. But, of course, the word of God is always relevant.

So there's that labor aspect. I remember when I was young in the ministry, and I didn't come myself from any sort of an academic kind of a background. That was about the farthest thing from my mind back in the days when I got saved.

As a matter of fact, my dad knew how much I hated to study or read. And so occasionally when he would discipline me, he would make me do a book report. That was pure torture for me.

I just didn't want to have anything to do with anything like that. And then I got saved. And I realized, wow, I've got to read because God has his word written down.

So I'm going to have to readjust my thinking about this. And, of course, I began to study the Bible. And I remember early on as a young intern pastor here at the church, I remember when I sat down with a book that I love to this very day.

It's a book called The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah. And it's written by a man named Alfred Edersheim. Alfred Edersheim was a man who was Jewish ethnically, but he became a believer.

He was a scholar from Oxford. And he wrote really the definitive work on the life of Christ. 1,500 pages, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah.

I have read through it twice. I remember the first time I read it, I understood about one-tenth of what I read. I remember reading through it, and I just had never heard words like this before.

I couldn't pronounce them. To a large degree, I didn't know what in the world he was saying most of the time. But every once in a while, I would come across a sentence or a paragraph that I really understood.

And, boy, it just impacted me. And I thought, this is a great book. And so a few years later, I picked it up, and I read through it again.

After I had then gone and, you know, developed my reading ability and so forth. And reading through it the second time, oh, how blessed I was in going through it. But I remember distinctly the labor of trying to make it through that book.

It was tough. It was hard work. I should have put on my boots also because it was like digging ditches.

And that's something that I had done quite a bit previously. But that's what the ministry, the teaching ministry entails. It entails a laboring in the Word of God.

Because as we labor in the Word of God, it bears that fruit and it comes into our lives personally. And then as teachers, we're able to commit that to you and to hopefully bless you through it. But Paul says to count those who labor in the Word and doctrine worthy of double honor.

And then he says in verse 19, now he's dealing with the subject of elders here. And I'll touch on these again. We mentioned them previously, but just real quickly.

He says, do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. So this is an important thing. There can be and many times are people who will attack those who are in church leadership.

And we'll try to find fault with just about anything. And so they'll come and bring accusations and so forth. Paul says, don't receive an accusation against an elder unless there are two or three others that come along with the same story.

Because of course, anybody could come along and make up anything at any time. And so Paul says to Timothy, be careful about receiving an accusation against an elder. But there are times when elders will sin as well.

And so Paul goes on and he does say, those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all that the rest also may fear. He says, don't easily receive an accusation. But if two or three people come and you can confirm that the accusation is legitimate, then rebuke that elder.

Rebuke them publicly so that others may fear as well. Notice the context here is elders. I have heard of and known about and witnessed to some extent churches where they would publicly rebuke people who sinned in the church.

That's not what the Bible says to do. It says rebuke the elders publicly. It's not talking about just, you know, the average Christian within the church.

And to rebuke somebody like that can be a devastating thing on their lives. But, of course, elders are people who have a greater privilege and, therefore, a greater responsibility. And so, therefore, there is a

greater accountability.

And there are those times when it is right and necessary to rebuke them publicly. Now, Paul says to Timothy, he says, I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality. Doing nothing with partiality.

In other words, Paul is saying, Timothy, don't hold back the rebuke simply because this person is an elder. Don't, we're not to have a double standard, in other words, in the ministry. You know, we're not to have one standard for church leadership and then another standard for everybody else.

Sometimes that happens within the church. It has happened many times historically. You know, you think of, of course, mentioning the passing of the Pope today.

And you think of the scandalous things that have happened within the Catholic Church over the past few years. All of the molestation cases and all of that that's been brought to the public's attention. And as bad as that is, and that is horrible, what's even worse is the way the church has chosen so often to sort of exercise a double standard in regard to disciplining those priests who are guilty of these things.

Where the average Christian, I'm sure, would receive a strong disciplinary thing, the priest, many times their hands are slapped and they're sent off to another parish somewhere to continue basically to do the same thing. That's a double standard. And that's completely wrong.

And there's never to be that kind of a thing in the ministry. That's what Paul's talking about here. No partiality.

We're not to have one standard for these people because, well, you know, they're part of the leadership or even, well, they're my friend. You know, sometimes that's what happens. Well, you know, he's a friend so we just, we don't want to deal with that.

But you would deal with it if it was somebody who wasn't your friend in a severe manner. Sometimes that happens with family as well. In a ministry, a family relationship can be a blessing or it can be a curse.

And the curse in a family-oriented ministry comes when you start showing preferential treatment to family members or partiality just because they're family members and you don't hold them to the same standard that everybody else is held to. That's when problems are created. So Paul says to Timothy, Timothy, don't show partiality.

And, of course, Timothy, in his actions, he's going to be setting an example for future church leadership. And then he says, do not lay hands on anyone hastily nor share in other people's sins. So in the context, again, Timothy, don't be hasty in the selection of elders.

Wait, pray, give it time. He will say later in the second epistle regarding a person in leadership within the church. He says, not a novice.

Timothy, don't select a novice because they can easily become lifted up with pride and to fall into the condemnation of the devil. So don't be hasty to appoint people to leadership because if you do, you end up sharing in other people's sins. He says, keep yourself pure.

Then in verse 23, and here's where we pick up with a new verse here. And it's interesting. In the midst of this teaching that Paul's imparting to Timothy about leadership in the church, Paul just suddenly diverts

onto a personal topic.

It could have been that as Paul's saying this, just suddenly he remembered something that was happening in Timothy's life personally. And he addresses it. He says, no longer drink only water.

But use a little wine for your stomach's sake and for your frequent infirmities. So, oh, by the way, Timothy, I know I'm talking about elders, but those stomach problems you've been having, I've been thinking about that. I've been praying about that for you.

Here's what you need to do. And I like that. I like that personal touch that Paul puts on it here.

And I also like the element of, you know, concern for things that sometimes we might think are mundane and not worthy of consideration in this sort of a context. You know, sometimes we get so hyper spiritual about things that we fail to remember that God is interested in just the everyday things of life as well. And Paul is writing here by inspiration of the spirit.

And he's, of course, expressing his own personal concern about Timothy. But I think beyond that, what's being expressed is the Lord's concern about Timothy's stomach problems. Did you know that God's concerned about your stomach problems? And he's concerned about your money problems.

And he's concerned about your family problems. He's concerned about all of those things. Sometimes we can, as I said, you know, sort of hyper spiritualize things to where we think that, well, you know, God's only concerned about, you know, these types of things.

These things up on that high spiritual level. But Jesus, of course, taught us better than that because he told us that the hairs on our head were all numbered by God. He said that a sparrow doesn't drop to the ground without God's consent.

He said that God is aware of the flowers that wilt under the sun. And in that context, Jesus said, oh, how much more does he care about you? Oh, you of little faith. And so Paul gives Timothy just some real practical counsel here.

Some people say, oh, well, how does wine help with your stomach problems? This probably here is more of a reference to non-fermented wine, grape juice. You know, it is a fact that grape juice, pure grape juice, has a medicinal application and has proven to have been effective in killing viruses and things of that nature. So it's probably grape juice that Paul is referring to here because the fermented wine would probably create more of a problem for the stomach.

But the grape juice would be medicinal and helpful. So now moving on, but in a sense sort of going back to what he was previously talking about, he says, Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. It's going back to what he was saying.

Don't lay hands on anyone suddenly. Watch. Take your time.

Be patient. Now, some men's sins are clearly evident. You're going to look at somebody and say, oh, no, that person's not a candidate at all.

Look at their life. He said, but some men's sins, they follow later. You see, it's not always so obvious.

And so I think it's again connected to what he's been saying about the elders. He's once again sort of warning Timothy not to be hasty because things are not necessarily as they appear always. And so it's wise to be patient in these things.

But some men's sins are clearly evident. That's a clearly evident statement, isn't it? Preceding them to judgment. But those of some men follow later.

You know, there are some people that, well, they don't see themselves as sinners. And unless you're real astute in a biblical understanding of what sin is, you might even find it hard yourself to pinpoint their sin. Not everybody is a blatant sinner.

Everybody is a sinner, truly. But not everybody is so blatant about it. But God, of course, knows all men.

He knows all things. And what's hidden to us, what's not so evident to us is evident to God. And it will show up later.

Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident. And those that are otherwise can't be hidden. So those who are, you know, I think what Paul is actually saying to Timothy is, Timothy, if it's not real obvious that this person is a candidate for the position of elder, don't move hastily in that direction.

There are some people that their good works are right out in front there. You can't miss it. But there are others you need to be careful about.

But I want you to notice something here. Paul mentions judgment. Some men's sins are clearly evident preceding them to judgment.

Judgment is a reality. The Bible says it is appointed to men once to die. And after this, the judgment.

There is a judgment that awaits every man. Now, this idea itself is a deplorable idea to the modern or the postmodern thinker. All the audacity of those Christians to talk about a judgment to come.

And especially talking about an eternal judgment. There's a philosopher named Anthony Flew. He's 81 years old.

Debated C.S. Lewis back in 1949. World-renowned atheist. Recently, he has renounced his atheism.

And he has admitted that he can't escape the fact that there must be an intelligent designer. Now, he makes it crystal clear that he is not a Christian. He doesn't want to be a Christian.

Although he thinks Jesus is a very intriguing historical person. And he's quite impressed with arguments for the resurrection of Christ. But he doesn't want to go in the direction of being a Christian.

But he has had to admit that there is so much complexity in the created world. That it could not have come about through naturalistic processes. So, he's actually renounced his atheism.

And he's become a deist comparing himself theologically with Thomas Jefferson. He said, I'm about where Thomas Jefferson was. Now, there's two reasons why he has been an atheist.

And now, you can still be a deist and basically hold on to these same ideas. Two things. Number one, he doesn't believe in anything supernatural.

Thinks the supernatural is an impossibility. Believes just in a naturalistic sort of thing. That's kind of strange.

Now that he's admitting there's a God. He still doesn't want to concede that there's a supernatural. But the second thing and the more important thing to him.

In his resistance of especially Christianity. Or any religion that would speak of a future judgment. His resistance is based on his repulsion of that idea.

That there's a God who would judge somebody. He says that the only possibility of eternal judgment. Would be that which would be meted out toward those who teach that there's eternal judgment.

That's the only place he could see room for it. Only those who teach it. He could understand how they might be judged eternally.

But he completely rejects the idea of an eternal damnation. God punishing people eternally. And of course he is voicing what many, many, many people do feel today.

They are appalled by this notion. By this suggestion. But I'll tell you what.

You cannot escape this when you look at the pages of scripture. Because it's all over the place. Judgment is coming.

But you know even philosophically. If there is no judgment. It's unacceptable.

If you really think things through. Judgment is a philosophical necessity. When you consider life in this world.

I just saw a movie called Downfall. It is a foreign film that gives a detailed account of the final days of the Third Reich. And the destruction of Berlin.

And it's an up close and personal with Adolf Hitler and his immediate staff. In those final days of the Third Reich. And here is a man who is indirectly responsible for the death of over 50 million people.

He is directly responsible for probably 10 to 20 million at least. Now Hitler never went into battle during the Second World War. He was never shot at.

They attempted to assassinate him with a bomb plot at one point. But it failed. He was never in harm's way.

He was never in danger himself. He was completely secluded. He just indulged himself completely in all of his fantasies.

And at the very end. He put a gun to his head and pulled the trigger. Now you tell me.

Is that all there is for Hitler? Indirectly responsible for the death of 50 million people. Tortured brutally in unthinkable ways. Millions of people.

As Dan mentioned Auschwitz and Birkenau and all of the rest of the concentration camps. And we know historically about the Holocaust and what he did. And you mean to tell me that the guy gets to put a gun to his head and pull the trigger and that's the end of it? He leads in this brutal unthinkable period of horror in

human history.

And he gets out of it with just a bullet in the head? Talk about a radical injustice. That would be a huge injustice right there. An injustice of proportions beyond anything we could comprehend.

If indeed that was the end of Adolf Hitler. But the Bible guarantees us that that was not the end of Adolf Hitler. Hitler was so deceived.

He was so committed to naturalism and Darwinism and survival of the fittest and all of those kinds of things. He was absolutely convinced at the end of his life that what awaited him was eternal peace. But we know from the biblical testimony that what awaited him is eternal torment and damnation.

You see, judgment is the only legitimate possibility when you look at the history of the human race. If there is no future judgment, you could never for a moment begin to make any sense of life on this planet. So when you do away with God and you do away with judgment, in the end you'd say that somebody like Hitler or Stalin, who was just as bad or probably worse, or Mao Zedong or any of those people.

If you do away with judgment, then you do away with there ever being any justice meted out upon these people. And there's something about that that just goes against the grain of everything we know as people to be right, isn't there? I mean, the thought of that is just like, no way. We know that that can't be the case.

We intuitively know that that can't be the case. It's not the case. There's a judgment.

Some men's sins are evident preceding them to judgment. The sins of others will they follow after. But there really is a judgment.

And it's coming upon this world. And you know, I think that the time has come when we need to be a little more clear about that very thing. You know, there's a funny thing with people.

Is that although you find your hardcore atheistic humanist to just completely reject all of this kind of thing. You know, most people though, deep down inside, hold a belief and have a fear that there actually is a judgment. And I believe that that is the case because God has instilled that in man.

God has written the law upon the hearts of every individual. It's dimmed through our sinful condition. But according to Romans chapter 2, traces of the law are there.

And that's why when a man breaks the law of God, that's why he has a sense of guilt and shame. And that's why he has also a sense of terror. Because he anticipates deep down that there's a judgment that's coming.

I think that as believers, we need to be a little bit more forthright with people about that. Not coming up to somebody and shaking our finger in their face and tell them, hey, you know you're going to hell. But just in a more matter-of-fact way in the opportunities that we have to discuss things with people and to share with them.

That we just bring up judgment as a reality. This is a reality that's coming. It's a certainty.

And so here Paul reminds us that there is a judgment day that's coming. And not only those who were the obvious sinners will be judged. But those who maybe were able to pull the wool over everybody's eyes in this life.

Yet they'll find that they were not able to do so with God. Even though they might have gotten away with it here. All things are naked and open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Now, as Paul carries on here, he says, Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor. So that the name of God and his doctrine may not be blasphemed. And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren.

But rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Now, of course, in biblical times, slavery was very much a part of the culture of the ancient world. Many times people are critical of the Bible because of the references to slavery.

Well, it certainly wasn't invented by God's people. As a matter of fact, God's people were slaves in Egypt, you remember. This is just a fact of human history.

It's just part of the experience of man in the world. Not only the ancient world, but it's still a reality to this day. People are critical of the New Testament sometimes because they say, Well, they didn't, you know, try to bring down slavery.

And oftentimes there is a comparison with what happened here in this country in regard to slavery. With what was going on in biblical times. You can't really make a comparison between those two things because they were considerably different.

Slavery was a different thing in the New Testament period than what occurred here in this country and in Europe prior to the 1800s. And so we don't need to get hung up on that. We can just understand that it was a different thing.

To a large degree, the slave and master relationship in New Testament times was very similar to the employee-employer relationship that we have today. Now, of course, you could always find cases of abuse and so forth. But generally speaking, that wasn't the case.

Now, the gospel was sent to deal with the root of man's problems, which is sin. The Bible says that man is a slave to sin, first and foremost. And so the gospel comes to deal with man's slavery to sin and to set him free from his captivity to sin.

If a person could be freed from their physical slavery, the scripture said, great, take your freedom. But if not, don't worry about it because you're the Lord's freed man. That's what Paul said in writing to the Corinthians.

You see, the Bible teaches the reality is everyone is in slavery. Even people living in democratic countries are in slavery. The vast majority of the population of the United States is in slavery tonight, slavery to sin.

Jesus came to set us free from sin. Whom the Son sets free is free indeed, He said. But had the apostles gone in and attacked this aspect of the culture, the church would have never been able to advance.

You see, whenever the church starts targeting primarily the physical issues, that's when the church fails. We have to primarily target the spiritual issues and then realize that as we target the spiritual issues, the physical issues will many times be taken care of because they are a symptom. They're just a manifestation of the greater spiritual problem.

Had they gone out and directly attacked slavery, they would have been seen as trying to just overthrow the structure of the world and they would have been stopped in their tracks. And I think this is one of the things that's happening to Christians today. When we go out and attack things from a primarily political standpoint, I think we're making a mistake because a lot of times, for one, we're not having much success in changing anything.

And secondly, we're being seen as subverting the way life itself just happens to work. And then there comes a real negative sort of an attitude against believers. I think if we spent more of our time praying and making sure we get the gospel to people, we would see much greater success because, you see, culture can change and society can change only when people change.

You try to change culture, you try to change society without changing the people in it and all you really do is impose something on them that they don't want on them and so they resist it, they rebel against it and you have all kinds of strife and conflict. But when they themselves have been changed, they then will themselves initiate the changes so many times. I'm not saying that we should never be involved in those arenas.

I think we should be involved in whatever arena God has placed us in, but I'm talking about the church itself collectively. I think we need to be careful to remember that we're here primarily to preach the gospel to people and to get them into the kingdom of God, not to squabble with them about politics or to worry about what party somebody's connected to. There's so much of that that has, I think, in many ways negatively affected the church today.

It's sort of polarized the church's ministry because, let's face it, a lot of people see Christians as simply conservative Republicans. And conservative Republicans are Christians. They've almost become synonymous in the minds of many people in the culture today.

And I think that's an unfortunate thing. I think we need to make clear that our allegiance is to Jesus Christ. And we're really primarily all about spreading his gospel and seeing people come to faith in him, not seeing them convert to my political persuasion or get on the bandwagon of my political agenda.

So Paul, instead of trying to overthrow the institution of slavery, he says, Rather, bondservants, under the yoke, count your masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and his doctrine may not be blasphemed. And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers. So Paul says, Just be good servants.

And you masters, be good masters. And that'll be the witness in and of itself right there. And then he says, Teach and exhort these things.

So Paul is saying to Timothy, Timothy, teach the people of God. Teach them how to live right as God's people. Teach them what the priorities are.

Teach them to have their priorities first and foremost in the realm of the spirit. The remainder of this epistle deals with the subject of materialism. And it really, again, is Paul setting forth the priority.

The priority is not the material. The priority is the spiritual. And he's going to address the whole issue of materialism.

He's going to address the whole issue of this idea that believing in God leads to material benefits. He's going to blow that idea out of the water. He's going to show how that is not consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But in the bigger picture, as I said, the bigger picture is the contrast between the spiritual and the material. As God's people, we are pilgrims and sojourners. Our citizenship is in heaven.

Our priorities are to be spiritual priorities. And if we get ourselves all bogged down in the material, whether it be materialism, living for money and for possessions and things like that, or if it's just being so caught up in a political process or an idea that we've got to establish a certain kind of a society or a culture or something like that, we'll be missing the point of what God wants us to understand. He wants us to understand that the spiritual is the priority.

So we keep the spiritual ever before us. But, as I said, when the spiritual is the priority, it'll always ultimately manifest itself in the physical material realm. But it'll do it in the proper way so that the end result is the right result because the foundation is right.

I mentioned before a book that I've been reading and have just finished up, a book that's emphasizing the need for Christians to charge forth with this cultural commission to bring society into harmony with God's principles. And in the presentation in this particular book, there is in some ways sort of a diminishing of the importance of preaching the gospel, sort of downplaying that a little bit. It's not just about getting people converted or fulfilling the great commission.

We've got to remember as Christians the cultural commission. But I don't believe that you can find a cultural commission in the New Testament. You can surely find the great commission.

But you see, the way the New Testament lays it out is as you fulfill the great commission, it automatically deals with the cultural issue. Because when people get saved, their lives change. And everywhere they work and live and what they're involved in is impacted by the fact that their life is transformed.

And so it automatically transforms society. You come from the outside and you try to impose rules and all of these things upon a rebellious people. It doesn't work.

It just creates strife. And we hear it all the time. I don't want people trying to shove their religion down my throat.

Those very same people that would say that sort of thing, they can come to faith in Jesus. And everything that people were hoping to accomplish by imposing regulations on them and more will actually take place. So the priority is the spiritual.

And that's what Paul says. Timothy, teach and exhort these things. The priority is the spiritual.

We need to see people come to Jesus Christ. And we need to stay out of the political realm and just get that gospel to them. In closing, just tell you a real quick story.

This last week, we had an opportunity to go over to Cal State Long Beach. And to do what we thought was going to be a debate. It ended up being a discussion with the head of Islamic studies from UCLA.

He was invited to come to Long Beach State. And Sammy Tanago and I were invited over to have a discussion with him and so forth. It was a beautiful thing to sit and to be able to present the gospel of

Jesus Christ without any political trappings to it.

Now this poor fellow, although he constantly made statements that we need to stay out of politics, he was riddled with politics. Everything he was saying was political. And we were able to just keep the message right down the line.

We're not here to talk about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We're not here to talk about the cultural conflict between Islam and Christian America. We're here to tell you about the significance of Abraham because that was the topic.

And the great significance of Abraham was that he was a link in a chain from Adam to the Messiah who's the savior of the world. And you know, the amazing thing was the response was very favorable. Now I'm certain had we gone down the political trail and got into the heated debate over the Middle East situation, it would have been an utterly fruitless endeavor.

But as we just simply kept it on the significance of Abraham in his relationship to Jesus Christ, the savior of the world, it was amazing. That these young Muslim students afterwards wanted literature. They wanted to know more about the message that we had given that day.

And it was again to me just another proof that the gospel itself, that's what it's all about. The spiritual over the material. Teach and exhort these things.

Father, we thank you that you have given us your word and how your word, Lord, just keeps us with that perfect balance and that heavenly perspective. Lord, we know that you've left us in this world to testify of your reality. And so, Lord, fill us with the Holy Spirit.

Fill us with your word. Fill us with love for lost people. And Lord, use us in these days.

Lord, as employees, wherever we're employed, may we be good witnesses. If we are business owners, may we be good bosses. Lord, may we be good leaders, good neighbors, good parents, good friends.

And through those things, may your good news go out to people, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen.

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