

1. God’s Grace Overcomes Our Family Dysfunction

- a. Half-Jewish
  - i. Not only was Timothy’s mother Jewish, but his father was Greek
  - ii. This is not merely a racial issue, but a religious one
- b. No religious community
  - i. It appears that Timothy’s Greek father would not allow him to be circumcised, thereby disabling him from attending synagogue worship in Lystra.
  - ii. Coupled with his mother’s (and grandmother) sincere and perseverant love of the Scriptures, and their teaching them to Timothy, this would have made Timothy an outsider in each religious, and therefore, social community
    1. He wouldn’t fit with the Greeks, because he was a lover and follower of the Scriptures (OT)
    2. He wouldn’t fit with the Jews, because he would have been considered an apostate
- c. It is also clear that his mother and his father disagreed on some very important and significant issues
  - i. What is true?
  - ii. What is valuable?
  - iii. What is good?
  - iv. His mother and grandmother, Lois and Eunice, were faithful to teach him the Scriptures so sufficiently that when Paul preached the gospel to them, they believed it, and Timothy was so well-instructed that Paul felt him equipped to pastor and oversee the church in Ephesus
    1. Their faithfulness, despite men who opposed them in such things, shows an incredible amount of fearless faith in God
    2. We thank God for such women, of whom there are many more who have affected us in like manner by their dogged determination and fearless faith and powerful and patient persistence
- d. It also appears, then, that his parents were most likely married for some reason other than like-mindedness on truth, values, and significance
  - i. It was most likely an arranged marriage for some reason other than God-honoring
    1. If Tim’s maternal grandfather gave his mother away in marriage to a non-proselyte Greek, then he didn’t care about God’s command not to intermarry with idolaters
    2. Debt could have been the reason that Eunice was married off
    3. Political power, citizenship, business, could have been reasons she was given to a Greek man
    4. She could have been taken in battle, too (although that we less likely)
  - ii. However, in none of these examples is there a good, solid, stable, and functioning oneness between Timothy’s parents
- e. Yet, such dysfunction did not stop God from saving Timothy, preparing him for effective ministry, and equipping him for both missionary and pastoral ministry
  - i. ILLUSTRATION: Bad/Absent Fathers and Strong Leaders:
    1. Abraham Lincoln’s father denied him educational opportunities and rented him out to neighbors for 10-30cent/day
    2. Lincoln later described his father as a fugitive and slave-owner, and referred to himself by saying, “I used to be a slave.”
    3. This hard and oppressive labor, though scarring him in many ways, compelled him to succeed, to rise above the oppressive abuse from the one man who was supposed to love him best, and enabled him to be the Great Emancipator when he was President, empathizing with slaves and the poor in a thoughtful and

compassionate manner (though he still had flaws, of course) and with fierce determination and self-sacrifice.

- f. Question: How does our family history bear upon God's attitude towards us?
  - i. Answer: It doesn't.
- g. Question: How does our family history play into our usefulness in God's Work?
  - i. Answer: It only works for our good.

## 2. God's Grace Overcomes Our Social Shame

### a. What is Shame?

- i. Shame is the feeling and belief that you are so *disgusting* because of something which you have done, which was done to you, or which is related with you, that you *cannot* be accepted or included
  - 1. It is most often symbolized in the image of nakedness – vulnerable, exposed, known...and sneered at, laughed at, rejected, or disdained.
- ii. Shame is not guilt, though they are related
  - 1. Guilt lives in the courtroom – “You have done a wrong thing. You have sinned. You are wrong.”
  - 2. Shame lives in the community – “You are defiled, unacceptable, and you don't belong among us.”
    - a. Maybe because of personal guilt (You did wrong, so you are unacceptable.)
    - b. Maybe because of sin done by another (You are ruined because of what has happened to you.)
      - i. Timothy would have been in this category
  - 3. Shame feels worse than simply being ignored, it is like being despised, mocked, or repelled.

### b. Apostate to the Jewish people

- i. It wasn't simply that Timothy had a Greek father, but rather that his lack of circumcision would have made him an apostate Jew in the eyes of religious Jews
  - 1. He would not have been allowed into the synagogue and put to open shame, not merely as an ignorant Gentile idolater, but as one who had rejected God explicitly
- ii. Thus, he was being shamed by the local Jews because of his father's refusal to circumcise him.

#### 1. **He bore the shame of his parents' choices.**

### c. The gospel of Jesus empowers the ashamed to live freely, boldly, and self-sacrificially

- i. Though Timothy didn't fit into either community, Jew or Gentile, the gospel of God's grace brought him great freedom and the inclusion into the community of the Church fully
  - 1. This is apparent by his participation and praise in that community of disciples of Jesus
  - 2. Timothy's character and competence was “testified to by the brothers”
    - a. Of two cities, too!
  - 3. Timothy was well-known as a “disciple”, that is, as a follower of Jesus and faithful servant of His gospel
- ii. Though his people rejected him, the gospel of Christ Jesus brought him into a community who knew God's mercies and accepted him because God, in Christ, did
  - 1. Ephesians 2:19-22
    - a. **Fellow citizens** in one kingdom of God's Son
    - b. **Fellow siblings** in one household of the Father
    - c. **Fellow stones** of one temple of the Holy Spirit

- d. Timothy didn't concern himself with impressing men, but merely with walking faithfully with God
  - i. The fact that both churches, in towns miles apart, could bear witness to his faithfulness, meant that he was a young man of integrity
  - ii. He wasn't one person to one group and a differing person to another group
  - iii. His reputation was widespread and consistent

### 3. God's Grace Compels Us to Serve Those Who Shame Us

- a. The circumcision of Timothy seems strange in the light of the Jerusalem Council's letter
  - i. If Greeks didn't need to be circumcised in order to be fully included, then why was Timothy circumcised?
    - 1. Being an uncircumcised son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother would have made him technically "an apostate Jew."
      - a. So, for Paul to include him on the team would have communicated to all the Jews in the area that Paul and Silas were apostates as well and they would not have been able to enter any synagogue.
  - ii. Therefore, by being circumcised, he was not performing a work which would gain him a hearing with God, but would gain him a hearing with men – **not for his sake, but for theirs**
    - 1. Remember that Paul refused to have Titus circumcised because it would have been under pressure of having done so for his salvation – not so here
    - 2. This circumcision was practical – it closed the door to the claim of apostasy and opened the door to minister through the synagogue network
    - 3. And this action was not done under pressure, unlike Titus or the Galatians, but rather freely as an act of love
  - iii. So, unlike a Gentile being circumcised to become an Israelite, this action "made an honest Israelite" out of Timothy, the "apostate Jew."
    - 1. The Scriptures never reveal circumcision of Jews to be a necessarily immoral thing!
    - 2. It is only when one *depends upon* his circumcision as a righteousness before God that it becomes something wrong to do
      - a. But "circumcision and uncircumcision are nothing" (Galatians 5:6)
      - b. That is, Jewish Christians are free to circumcise their sons, but recognize that it doesn't gain God's blessing.
      - c. And Gentile Christians are free not to circumcise their sons, but recognize that such a refusal also does not gain God's blessing
      - d. The only righteousness that we have before God comes from God and is received by faith in Jesus (Romans 3:21-23; Galatians 2:16; Philippians 3:9)
- b. The negative reason that Paul circumcised Timothy was because the Jews in the area *knew* his "apostate" status
  - i. In other words, if this were not the case, if they did not know Timothy's situation, Paul would not have circumcised him, but the conditions made it better for him to be circumcised than to remain uncircumcised
  - ii. It is clear that Timothy's circumcision made "going with them" a possibility in the light of the particular knowledge of Jews in the area
    - 1. In other words, this is a very particularized action – particular to Timothy, as the son of a faithful Jewish mother and a pagan Greek father, in a particular place where all the Jews knew that he was not Jewish (in their terms)
- c. By circumcising him, Paul is clearly showing a desire to continue evangelizing Jews

- i. Though he is known as the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul never neglected to minister to his Jewish kin in every town
- ii. This effort shows his compassion and his love for his Jewish brothers, as he does not want to unnecessarily place stumbling blocks before them as they proclaim the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus
- iii. If Paul “became as a Jew in order to gain the Jews” (1 Cor 9:20), then why should not Timothy, also Jewish, live as a fulfilled Jew **in order to gain Jews?**
- d. In a very real sense, this is the “2<sup>nd</sup> case study” of what the “law of love” means in practice as it was recommended by the Jerusalem Council:
  - i. Barnabas and Paul chose to compromise on their plan in order to accommodate each of their conscientious objections regarding John Mark’s travel to Asia Minor
  - ii. This circumcision of Timothy is the 2<sup>nd</sup> case study – not compromising on the gospel, but according to the law of love, in order to gain Jews to Christ, Paul, Silas, and Timothy show a practical flexibility (especially Timothy!!) which is ruled by love of others for the sake of Christ Jesus
  - iii. This is why Luke includes such detail in each of these brief stories – they are case studies of the general principle of Acts 15 – binding my freedom for the sake of the gospel, i.e. the law of love for the honor of Christ and the salvation of the other
- e. The Law of Love compels the constraint of liberty for the sake of the glory of Christ and the salvation of men
  - i. Timothy didn’t need their approval, but he desired their salvation

#### 4. What Shall I Do When I Feel Ashamed?

- a. Fix Your Eyes Upon Jesus, Your Sufficient Righteousness Before God!
  - i. Hebrews 12:2-3
    - 1. The joy which lies ahead is so glorious that the shame of the cross cannot compare to it: “Shame, you are worthless in comparison to the joy!”
    - 2. Thus, Jesus shamed Shame by fixing his eyes upon the joy it would produce.
- b. Shame your shame by fixing your eyes on the joy set before you because of Jesus’s work!
  - i. The gospel tells us that we are all equal in our need for covering – we are ALL unworthy, so throw comparison out the door of your heart!
    - 1. Galatians 3:22
  - ii. The gospel preaches to you of God’s great mercies towards the unclean, the sinners, the ashamed, the outsiders – in Christ we are together, welcomed, belonging to God
    - 1. 1 Peter 2:9-10
  - iii. The gospel tells us that Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers!
    - 1. Hebrews 2:10-13
  - iv. The gospel frees us from needing people’s approval
    - 1. Psalm 118:6
  - v. The gospel sets the path through the fields of suffering to the city of joy – and it is **WORTH IT!!**
    - 1. Phil 3:8-11

Conclusion: When you are feeling ashamed, when others around you are declaring your shame, what shall you do? Look at the one who bore your shame, who became disgusting in the eyes of God, FOR YOU, so that you are no longer seen as shameful, dishonorable, or unclean, but rather as glorious by faith in Him. Fix your eyes upon the love of God, restoring what is broken and declaring it glorified. Taking was once far off and bring you near to Himself, to be His own possession. And treasure Him, rest in His work, and behold Him, so that you can endure the cross you are called to bear, shame the shame placed upon you, and then sit down with Him in the perfect delight of God. Only with such vision will you be able to love those who shame you, and by His Spirit within you, you can and you shall. To the glory of God.

Vv4-5:

5. The Decree of the Gospel of God's Grace Must be Guarded
6. The Decree of the Gospel of God's Grace Builds the Church