

Our Moral Authority

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[0 : 00] Our reading is from 1 Timothy, Paul's first letter to his child in the faith, Timothy.

In the context of this is that Paul has left Timothy in Ephesus in order to deal with some false teaching that's been going on and to put things in order, to guard the deposit, as he says, and he says this in verse 5.

I think this is a wonderful summation of Paul's ministry and actually the ministry of any preacher. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. And what's been going on there in the church has done just the opposite, just squabbles and different things that have been going on.

And so he's left this young man there to carry out the task of getting things in order. We're going to pick up in verse 12. I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service.

[1 : 22] Though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent, but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

To the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience.

By rejecting this, some have been made shipwreck of their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme. May God grant us understanding of his word.

Timothy had a good job in front of him. He had to go and straighten this mess out. And he's a young man. It's alluded to later on the letter that he's young.

[2 : 46] And yet Paul says, you know, that's not an issue. It's not an issue that you're young. You've been called by God to do this work. And I've trained you. And you need to step out and do it.

I think our living our lives and our carrying forth with the gospel as we've been called to do is challenging for us at times because of our lack of confidence in our moral authority to speak about sin.

I mean, I've spoken with parents who are concerned of their ability to expect their child to refrain from behavior that they themselves had participated in.

It's not unusual. It's not an unusual thought to have, particularly if the parent becomes a Christian later in life. They did things that now they recognize they shouldn't have been doing and have made a decision to bring their children up, making every effort to get them to avoid the same mistakes that they made.

They fear, though, however, that the child goes, yeah, well, you did it. So how can a parent speak with moral authority in the child's life despite the fact that the parent has done the things he or she regrets and certainly does not want the child to be doing?

[4 : 07] The same dynamic can happen if you become a Christian and you're speaking to some of your old friends. Yeah, they know you. They walked with you.

You're speaking with them of their need to repent of behavior and they say, or at least they think, who are you to tell me what to do? You are as big of a troublemaker as I am. How can that one speak with moral authority to someone who knows too much about you?

And though it's not as directly related, perhaps, but when someone in a more general setting says, judge not, lest ye be judged, they're asserting that you do not have the moral authority to point out behavior that you yourself might have done.

Now, of course, that's different because they're using the Scripture wrong. But nonetheless, that's the challenge. How can we speak with moral authority to the non-Christian?

And what about me? What about me standing up here right now in front of you all, given the task to tell you how you're supposed to live? How does a preacher speak with moral authority to the congregation?

[5 : 27] So how can we speak into other people's lives about their need to repent, their need to live according to God's rule, their need to embrace the reality that God is?

How can we speak into other people's lives and when we instruct our children about how they are to live? What is the source of our moral authority? We're going to turn to Paul, and surprisingly so, given the depth of his depravity and the way in which it manifested itself to discover how we can speak with moral authority.

And this is going to involve our calling, our humility, our example, and our gratitude. Our calling, our humility, our example, and our gratitude.

Let's first take our calling. What does Paul say in verse 12? I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, appointing me to his service.

Paul is speaking about his call to be an apostle. In fact, he opens up this letter. He says, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope.

[6 : 44] So, he can speak with moral authority because he has been called to the stewardship of the gospel of God. Now, this is something he had to fight for at times.

One could argue that both of the letters that we have that he wrote to the Corinthian church, he had to defend his apostleship before some people. But, you might recall, when he went to Jerusalem to check out with the important men there, the nature of what he had been preaching, and he was affirmed, indeed, in his calling.

He was affirmed in his apostleship and particularly to the Gentiles. So, his first resource to speak with moral authority is his call from God. This is also true for you and for me.

Paul was called to a particular kind of ministry, that of an apostle, but each of us are called to bear witness to the revealed truth of God. What does Jesus say?

In the Great Commission, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go. Go and be witnesses for me. See, we're all tasked with making the gospel known.

[7 : 53] And a fundamental part of making the gospel known is the need for those who are speaking to to understand their need for the finished work of Christ. They need the righteousness that can only come from Christ.

Now, when we speak to others about this, I'm not saying they're going to buy it. I'm not going to say that they're going to accept you as a moral authority, but you, as a Christian, should have confidence that as a believer in Jesus, you have the right, indeed, the obligation to plead with people to be reconciled to God.

Paul felt this calling. I'm under obligation, he says in Romans 1. I'm under obligation both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, both to the wise and foolish.

Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. So, if it's someone who is challenging you as to why they should listen to you, know that they should be listening to you because you have been called by God to make the truth known.

Now, as a parent, you also have the authority given you as a parent to teach your children. This, too, is a calling. What does Paul write in Ephesians?

[9 : 12] You are to bring up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. That's a calling. The child is supposed to obey you but more importantly they need to heed you for the sake of wisdom.

My son, if you receive my words, treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding, yes, if you can call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver, search for it as hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

What a calling it is for a parent to call a child to listen to the wisdom that they have gained because of their own following of Christ.

For a child to come under the authority of their parents, it's a great blessing for they are learning to be in tune with how God has made things. You see, if people do not understand that authority is an inescapable reality in God's creation, they will have a rough, rough go of it and will cause them to harm themselves and to others.

Authority is vitally important to understand of how God runs his universe. And to go against it is again to put yourself in a place of harm and maybe even others.

[10 : 35] So, there is a calling that we have as Christians to make the gospel known. And again, people might not listen to you, but you should have confidence that when you speak about Jesus, about their need for his righteousness, about their need to repent, you've been called to that by God.

Just as Paul was called to stand as an apostle, he knew he had been called by God. You've been called by God to preach the gospel, to make it known to your loved ones, to your friends, to your co-workers.

You have that authority because you've been called by God. And you, as parents, you've been called to exercise authority in your home towards your children, to do it with grace, to not provoke them to anger, to not be foolish, but yet, you have authority and it's not to be yielded.

And of course, those who serve in the church in positions like I'm standing here or elders or others within the church, again, they've been called and that calling brings with it authority.

It gives them the obligation of speaking as they do. Not just the right, but the obligation. Now, the thing about calls is that one, a call is something placed on you by God.

[11 : 52] It's also something that you have to accept. A call is placed on you by God, but it's also something you have to accept. By that, I don't mean that you get to choose whether or not you're going to accept the call.

I mean that you have to get used to the fact, to accept the fact, that a call has been placed on you. There's just no way around it. When we're called by Jesus to be a follower of Jesus, when we are disciples to follow Him, there's a call that rests on each one of us to preach the gospel.

Same thing for those who've been called into ministry. There's a call that's there and it's one thing that can say, you know, oh, I don't feel very comfortable with it. So, well, that's fine. That's fine. But the call is still there and one has to learn to accept it.

See, Jonah had a call placed on him, didn't he? He didn't accept it but he couldn't avoid it. And if you know the story, you'll remember to what lengths God went showing Jonah that God's call upon him was unavoidable.

So, our call is something placed on you by God. It's also something you have to accept. But the thing about this is our calling is always for the other.

[13 : 02] Always for the other. For the parent, you want your child to trust you and your directives so that they will avoid the myriad of troubles that will come their way if they do not understand how the world works, how the fallen world works.

And each one of us, as we make ourselves open to the demands of the call as one who bears witness to Christ, because you know that without faith in Christ, the person you are speaking to will spend an eternity in the torments of hell, you understand that your call is for the other.

And that is the preacher. A preacher is to accept the call not for the prestige or attention that it will bring him but because those under his care need to know Jesus both as Savior and Keeper.

I listened to the sermon and Colin had referenced this book, The Art of Pastoring by David Hansen and he says this about his own misunderstanding when he was following the call that he believed was on his life and as he watched this one pastor who had a great influence on him as a young man and he knew that when he was listening to him that he knew that he was to be a pastor himself.

But then he says about this, about himself, I misconstrued ministry as full-time security in the womb of the church. He came to see that the call to pastoral ministry is a call out of the womb of the church into the perilous and painful role of being pregnant with the church, of giving birth to it, of nursing and raising it.

[14 : 38] The call is for the other. So our calling is always for the other. So our moral authority begins with our calling.

Secondly, our humility. And this is the part that's somewhat ironic. I mean, the very thing that makes us feel as though we lacked moral authority, our failing, becomes one of the reasons why we can speak into people's lives.

Listen to how Paul speaks of himself in our passage. Though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, an insolent opponent, but received mercy. I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief.

And the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost.

As I said, the context of this confession is Paul charging Timothy to remain in Ephesus, charge some of the men there that they are to teach according to what the gospel had been given to them, what they had been entrusted with.

[15 : 45] And the nature of the wrong of the teaching is not explicitly defined, but more than likely it's tinged with some Judaistic practices. But the content is not as important as the effect it was having.

Paul says it produces vain speculation, ceaseless controversy, rather than love that issues from a pure heart good conscience and sincere faith. And that's what he tells Timothy the aim of our charge is.

So, some in Ephesus were using the law of Moses to wander down rabbit holes of pointless discussions which he knows can have and has had disastrous effects. But Paul wants Timothy to put a stop to this.

But he's quick to say that the law is good if it's used lawfully. The law warns of the consequences of the lawful activity. It defines sinful behavior and therefore show how we are to live.

Paul, using the law lawfully, describes his former unlawful life. And he pulls no punches, he offers no excuses, he was a blasphemer, a persecutor, an insolent or a violent man.

[16 : 51] He was thoroughly unrighteous, he was thoroughly lost. But he received grace. In fact, it overflowed to him and brought him to the faith and the love that are in Jesus.

This despite his being as far as he was concerned the chief, the foremost, the worst of sinners because why he persecuted the church. But Jesus came to save sinners and that is why Paul was and that is why he needed, that's what Paul was and that is why he needed Jesus and why he laid hold of Jesus when his eyes were opened to see him for who he really was and not what he thought he was.

So another source for Paul's moral authority is actually his former immorality. He acknowledges it, he confesses it, and in so doing he identifies with the sinner and speaks from understanding.

He knows what grace is, he knows what mercy is, because he needed them both in abundance as the worst of offenders. So we need to bear this in mind and when we speak to others.

If we really appreciate what has been done for us, our speaking into the other person's life will have a humble authenticity to it, will not come off like we are pointing fingers or clucking our tongues, will not be like that Pharisee who looked down upon the tax collector and said, oh, I'm glad I'm not like that other man.

[18 : 19] John Piper observes that the effect on one who is ever mindful of his own failings, he believes and feels his own weakness and unworthiness and lives upon the grace and pardoning love of God.

This gives him a habitual tenderness and gentleness of spirit. So, our very, the very things that cause us to be concerned about whether we can speak with moral authority to our children because we may have done something that we don't want them to do, to our friends because we used to do the same things they used to do, it's those very things, if we approach them with humility, understanding that we need the grace of Jesus, that we can now speak with that authority.

We will urge repentance from a repentant heart. What does David say? I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will return to you.

When? When God has mercy upon him. Now, we can't control, again, how people respond, but we should give them no cause to think we're looking down upon them.

Humility gives us authority. humility. And as parents, we might find this hard to do, depending on the age of your children, just how much you want to reveal about all the things that you did, but nonetheless, you want to remind them that you are mindful of what it's like to have to be forgiven.

[19 : 41] They should know that you consider yourself someone who needs the grace of God as much as they do, that you know what it's like to rebel against God, to walk the broad path rather than the narrow.

And when you wrong them, you ask for forgiveness. And when they ask for forgiveness, you do it readily and with humility. Why? Because you yourself have been forgiven.

So we're calling our humility. Next, our example. Paul goes on to say, But I receive mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

Now, that begins, as it did for Paul, with our conversion. And if he can save, if God can save the apostle Paul, he can save anyone. What does he say about himself?

I persecuted this way to death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women. You know, I was relating this story earlier. I was asked to come and to preach at the church that I had grown up in.

[20 : 53] It was a small congregational church in New England in the state of Connecticut in the small town that I grew up. And they heard that I had gone into the ministry, so they invited me to preach. So I came and I preached and then afterwards we were down in the fellowship hall talking and Mrs. Woodward, who was the fifth grade Sunday school teacher, just stood there looking at me going, no.

No, I was a mess. Me and I, myself, my friends, we were just terrors. And we passed from one class to the next, one class to the next, and finally they got rid of us.

But God can save Paul and God can save me to Mrs. Woodward's amazement. He can save anyone. And when we are saved, we become an example.

But that example, or our ability to speak with moral authority, has credibility only if our life matches what we're saying.

Listen to what he says to Timothy later on. Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

[22 : 05] Do not neglect the gifts that you have, which was given you by prophecy, when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Paul's example, Timothy's example, and my example lends credibility, and so we can speak then with moral authority.

That is, that we're not just saying, you know, don't do as I do, just do as I say. No, what we say and what we do have to line up. And when they do, we can speak about from a consistency of our life.

And those are the questions we need to ask ourselves. Do our children, for instance, or do our friends see consistency in our lives? Do we act one way in church and another way when we're away from church?

See, there is no place for do as I say and not as I do. What does Peter say again? Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evil doers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Our example is important because we're living as though what we are saying is true and necessary. And so we allow it to shape our lives and we can speak them with authority.

[23 : 20] People look and they understand there's authenticity to who we are. But even as we pursue lives that are a fitting example, a walk worthy of the calling with which we have been called, our godly example is still a work of grace.

It is God who works in you both the will and to work for his good pleasure. And Paul says if I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. So calling, humility, example of a changed life, these all give rise to the last of our resource to speak with moral authority and that is our gratitude.

What does Paul say in verse 17? To the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. That outburst of praise that finishes this passage is not uncommon for Paul.

He is constantly amazed at the glory and the majesty and the mercy of God. Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments, how inscrutable his ways.

And from him and through him and to him are all things to whom be glory forever. Amen. And then in Ephesians, now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we can ask or think according to the power that works in us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

[24 : 43] Amen. See, this kind of language signals that Paul knows it is God and God alone who has brought about his salvation, the new reality that he's living in, the new life that he possesses.

And if we're doing all of this well, we will be communicating that it is not we ourselves who are coming up with the criteria as to what is righteous and what is not.

It will be something that has come from God that we ourselves have submitted to and we are grateful for it. And we'll not be suggesting that we can take any credit for our progress, any credit in righteousness that we have made, nor will we be interfering, inferring, excuse me, that they can be and do what God wants them to be and do by pulling themselves together.

Father, we'll be speaking of the grace, love, power, and mercy of God in a way that gives him all the glory. Our gratitude, our gratitude also gives us moral authority.

Let your light so shine before others so they may see your good works, give glory to your Father who is in heaven, Jesus says. And we will be able to do this because we will be offering gratitude from our hearts for the greatness of God's love and grace.

[25 : 59] God's love and love. So we speak with moral authority because we are called. We speak with moral authority because we understand, we walk in humility.

We speak with moral authority because our lives line up with that which we're preaching. And we speak with moral authority because we speak from a heart of gratitude. We understand it is all God's doing.

And so we give him the glory. Now, though I've been quoting and alluding to the Bible throughout, I've not posited that the Bible itself is a source for our moral authority.

Of course, on one level it is. It is the revealed will of God and teaches us what is moral and what is immoral and does so with divine authority or as Paul tells Timothy that is all scripture is breathed out by God, profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, for training in righteousness.

So the Bible is indispensable in exercising moral authority for it defines what is moral. But if our efforts are not characterized by the things we've spoken of, by our calling, by our humility, by the example of a transformed life, by gratitude, then we're going to use the Bible like a club and not as a light as it's meant to be.

[27 : 16] You know, you'll often, somebody, say within the church circles, you know, if God can speak through a donkey, he can speak through you. Well, God can speak through a donkey. He did speak through a donkey.

He'd rather speak through you. He'd rather not have to resort to a donkey. And so God calls us to make the gospel known and he calls us to that in his holy word.

He tells us what it is that is the need, who he is, what's needed, how it is that he has supplied Jesus, all the things that come with preaching the gospel. It's there in his word. And so we speak with authority for ourselves because we know that this is God's revealed will.

But it's going to only carry impact with those we speak with if we accept the fact that we're being obedient to what God has called us to. We're walking in humility.

Our lives line up with the grace of God as it's been revealed to us and we are grateful. Then the Bible has life to it. Then the Bible speaks because it speaks from a person who themselves have been shaped and molded by its revealed truth.

[28 : 29] In a little bit we're going to close by singing amazing grace and you're probably familiar with some of the story of John Newton of how he was, oh, well he describes himself as I was capable of anything.

I had not the least fear of God before my eyes nor so far as I remember the least sensibility of conscience. That's where he was. But then God gets hold of him and makes him into a man who is able to pen the words of amazing grace that congregations have been singing and will continue to sing, I dare say, until the Lord returns.

And this is what he wrote in his last will and testament. I commit my soul to my gracious God and Savior who mercifully spared and preserved me when I was an apostate, a blasphemer and an infidel and delivered me from the state of misery on the coast of Africa into which my obstinate wickedness had plunged me and who has been pleased to admit me, though most unworthy, to preach his glorious gospel.

I think you can hear in that all the things we've been talking about, that calling, that humility, that example and that gratitude. Again, to quote John Piper about John Newton, this is one of the deepest roots of his habitual tenderness.

He could not get over the wonder of his own rescue by sheer triumphant grace. Where is the source of our moral authority? It comes from the things we've been speaking of.

[29 : 55] And we have to walk in confidence of it. And if we do it in the way that I believe God calls us to, as Paul sets the example, we can have confidence. Again, they might not listen.

You hope, you pray, you want them to listen. But you speak. You speak with authority. Because God has called you, because you understand, you walk in humility, a life transformed, and you are grateful.

Let's pray. Gracious God, we are woefully, woefully weak when it comes, I think, to speaking with authority and doing it well.

There are plenty of preachers and plenty of others who can berate people and can act like they've got real authority and can challenge and push and prod and essentially just chastise people constantly.

And all do so supposedly with the authority that God has called them. But Lord, I think sometimes such men do more harm than good because they're not humble.

[31 : 06] And their lives don't necessarily line up with the things that they're preaching. In fact, it's always a travesty when just the opposite happens and it shows up in the news. And Lord, they're not grateful.

You'd think listening to them sometimes that they were the unhappiest men on earth. We pray, God, that that would not be the case for us. that we could speak with authority because of you, because of what have you done for us and in us and hopefully what you'll do through us.

All to your glory. In Christ's name. Amen.