



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

1 TIMOTHY 1:1-18

NOVEMBER 2017

Only Sinners Need Apply

I was extremely blessed in my early years to know a business man who loved to share Jesus with men who claimed not to be interested in salvation. He called it “winning souls.” He was very good at it as he would not try to convert someone who was not being convicted by the Spirit.

One day he approached a man and offered to talk with him about his relationship with God. “I don’t want to talk about God. Anyway, I’m no worse than half the people down there at the church, even the deacons,” he bellowed. Mr. O’Neal was gentle and firm in his reply. “Ok. You are a man God can’t save.” The man wanted to argue. “Yes, he can.” Mr. O’Neal shook his head and began to walk away. The man followed him. “Why

do you say that God can’t save me?” Mr. O’Neal stopped and said, “God can only save sinners, and you don’t think you are a sinner.” The man opened up and finally prayed with his new mentor.

Sometimes we forget that, and we portray God as loving only good people. That is false religion. The message often conveyed is that if we will be good, God will love us more, and that the better we are, the more he loves us. We slip

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into believing that sin disqualifies us from relating to God, when actually sin is what qualifies us for salvation. Jonathan Edwards said, "You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary." God is intent on revealing his name, and his name is all about mercy (Ezekiel 36).

God took the initiative. **He considered him faithful, though he was faithless.**

Take for instance the apostle Paul's description of his own salvation in his first letter to Timothy. He claimed that he was the worst of sinners and that God's mercy to him gives hope to any and all others, since he was the worst case. We can see what he meant. Before he met Christ, Paul believed that he was not guilty of breaking God's Law, and that his credentials were better than all others.

... If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Philippians 3:4-6 (ESV)

He was too good to need saving. But, he had rejected the one thing that matters most to God. He refused to believe that God loved him unconditionally and eternally without regard to his goodness. He says that God showed him mercy because he acted in ignorance. Some have interpreted that as a viable excuse. He just didn't know. But spiritual ignorance is not a matter of not having the information available. It is a judgment on those who have seen truth

but chose not to embrace it. Ignorance is the darkness that comes when light is rejected. Paul had read and memorized Moses' words, but he missed the Jesus that Moses presented. The Law had no conviction for him, because he thought he was keeping it. His faith-community affirmed his beliefs and behavior. There was no external instrument that could be used to convict him. God loved Paul so much that he personally confronted him on the road to Damascus. God's actions were not in response to Paul. God took the initiative. He considered him faithful, though he was faithless. He called him, though he was not looking for a job. He empowered him with his own Spirit to believe and to love. Paul met and felt the love of God and it transformed him. Yes, it took time to process. He spent approximately three years in the desert rethinking his whole story. When he came back, he could

confidently offer the gospel to anyone in any circumstance.

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In our focal text, Paul reminds Timothy that love is the goal of all Christian instruction. The goal is not first goodness, it is love that proceeds from a heart made new by God through Jesus. Only God can give us a pure heart. He promised it in Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's prophecies of the new covenant. Only God can free us from the condemnation of a guilty and dirty conscience. Only God can offer faith with no mixture. When a person is so loved by God, he or she begins to love the same way. When we love like that our whole focus on life changes. Our behavior changes, though we might not even be conscious of it. Selfless people are not

usually stingy, critical, and self-serving. Obedience is the outgrowth of love, and loving is the result of knowing you are loved. People who know they are loved in such a way by God, are not afraid of New Testament commands. They indicate that Christ's life in the believer can do what human willpower cannot. Remember! Jesus commanded a man with a withered hand to stretch it forth, then gave

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him the power to obey. He commanded Lazarus to come forth from the dead, and then empowered him to obey. This brings both comfort and excitement to us when we hear, "Love your enemies," or "Bless those that curse you," or any of the otherwise humanly impossible commands given in the scriptures.

"Worst sinners" make good saints. They are usually unconscious of their humility and joyful in their attitude. What is the worst thing we can do? Maybe, it is refusing to believe that Jesus loves us as he does. What is the most pleasing thing we can do? Believe that he loves us and embrace it fully.

For those wondering what heaven will be like, it must be the eternal discovery of how much God loves us and enjoying it.



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