

Competitiveness in the Church

Richard J. Chase

- Announcer

Chase, who is the president of our Biola schools and thus the president of Talbot Theological Seminary. And we welcome him to our chapel this morning. We appreciate his continued support and his interest in our program here at Talbot seminary. The Lord bless you as you minister.

[Applause]

- Chase

I think when the pressures are the greatest it's when sympathy needs to be extended and it's only a suggestion, but perhaps some of the profs would like to come up with very easy final exams. Would that be appreciated? I don't.

[Laughter and scattered applause]

I should add then too, that I have really no authority to tell them what kind of exams to come up, so they're going to do what they want. But I just wanted you to know where I am. All right.

[Laughter]

Chase – Competitiveness in the Church

We live in an extremely competitive society. I suspect you realize that. All you have to do is to open the Sunday or the Saturday times and look at the ads for the various churches to find that competition even is found in the method of advertising to see if we can get more people into our church than the next church. And as you look at many of the books that are popular and some of them I have seen in pastors' studies I trust they're there so they can find very interesting and at times entertaining illustrations on the fine art of winning or "How To Get Your Own Sweet Way" or whatever it may be.

And that seems to be a pattern, I guess, that is permeating our life just as effectively I guess, and with perhaps many of the problems, that it permeated the life and times in which so many of the people who were used of God to write the Scriptures lived and walked upon this Earth. The Apostle Paul of course used many competitive figures and perhaps from reading through there we catch a glimpse of the excitement perhaps that he had in following some of the games that would take place. And yet somehow or other Paul also was used of the Spirit of God to blend that desire to do his very utmost for Christ and to use some of those illustrations.

And he was used of God to, to write such things as we read in Galatians chapter 6 or Philippians chapter 2 or the well-known First Corinthians chapter 13. How can that humility that is God-given be found in an individual who wants to do his very best? And that very best sometimes means that it may be better than somebody else.

Chase – Competitiveness in the Church

And it's difficult to try to blend these and to do them in an effective way. Some of these attitudes, in a variety of ways I think, creep up in my life and perhaps in your life and the lives of some of I guess our friends and brothers around the Christian world.

I won't ask for a show of hands, but if I did I'll bet you over half of this group would raise their hand that they had been in a church that had split. Either their church is a product of a split or they have been in the church that, where they are the few that remain after somebody else left or a big body left.

And here in the Southland you can, you'll take far more than your fingers on your hands or, with shoes and socks off, your toes to begin to list the churches that have been created through this marvelous method of church planting known as splitting. And they are all over the place and many of them are because there are individuals, I am persuaded, in there who are competitive in nature and do not know how to lose gracefully and can only win. And sometimes that causes them to go elsewhere and to do their own thing and then elsewhere and then elsewhere.

And that happens so often in life that as I begin to reflect upon the conclusion of this year and things I'd like to leave with particularly those of you who are graduating, but also for those of you who are in various avenues of Christian work, I'd like to just share some things with you that, that I have found helpful in my life that are not mastered but that I have found helpful in my life and perhaps would be helpful in your life.

Chase – Competitiveness in the Church

And during the course of this year, in fact in general administration there are enormous situations that come along, and more and more I am persuaded that the heart of it is competitiveness. The heart of it is the ability to see things your way and not be able to recognize that by giving something greater can be gained. I find that in my own life. I find that in the lives of students. I find that in the lives of even individuals far from this campus that many times are involved in the great ministry of preaching the message of salvation in Christ.

I want to focus on the passage of Scripture perhaps well-known to you. It's in Second Timothy the first chapter, verse 7. "For God has not given us the spirit of timidity but of power and love and discipline." There is nothing in this verse that would cause us to take a back seat on being firm in our resolve to do what God wants us to do. There is nothing in this particular verse and certainly nothing in Second Timothy that would ever encourage us to compromise what we believe God wants us to do.

So there is no hint in this book and no possibility of taking a verse like this and bending it to come up with a kind of life that is spineless or a kind of attitude or Christianity that is lukewarm. But there is an unusual blending of words here, that are put together I think in the active kind of life that stands in contrast to the fear that had perhaps paralyzed Timothy or Paul thought might. Or that timidity that might have been there. Now I want to suggest to you, first of all, that I am not to talk to you as a Paul to Timothys because I'm a Timothy too and I look at Paul and what he has done: the unusual way in which he can blend decisiveness with humility for the cause of Jesus Christ and at times that is a mystery. As I look at Paul's life and what he was able to do. Recognizing of course that under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the ability that he had of

Chase – Competitiveness in the Church

walking and learning at the hand of Christ Himself in that wilderness experience, that he has advantages that we do not have. But we have the advantage of the Word of God given to us through the instrument, the human instrument of Paul and the divine instrument of the Spirit. And so we can all be Timothys and look at some of these things and see what might be here that would help us.

Basically my thesis is this: that in place of timidity, if we want to be individuals of action, we need to recognize that we can accomplish great things as we blend power and love and faith. And action, it seems to me, biblical action as Paul presents it here in Timothy, is wrapped up in those three words: power, love, and discipline or self-control.

Notice the context though, the word for as it begins in verse 7 obviously points us back and verse 8 begins therefore and draws from. Just very briefly I would suggest that the for that points back indicates the, the source, the bases, or the possibility for action if you will. And as I read in verses 5 and 6 it focuses upon the faith that was in Timothy. He was, to put it bluntly, plugged in to the power of God. It was not his power, it was always there, but sometimes perhaps he was not plugged in.

You don't store that power like a battery. It's not like a bomb that is stored away in the, in the belly of a ship as it were or in the bomb bay of a, of a plane. That's not where it is. It's there, it's for the use. But if you are not plugged in immediately, it is not available.

Chase – Competitiveness in the Church

Paul points out that Timothy had that in his faith; came through his family and through his own personal commitment. Also his calling, Paul seems to tie that in in verse 6 and he wants that, that faith rekindled and used in a mighty way. So the possibility for action as opposed to timidity it seems to me is based in our relationship with Christ. But then the purpose of it is not simply for self-satisfaction. The purpose is for salvation. And you cannot read very far after verse 7 without beginning to see exactly what Paul has in mind.

"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the Gospel according to the power of God." And we'll look at a couple of these other verses in just a moment. But if you would read on the verses nine, ten, eleven, twelve along and there you see that the purpose of the power that Timothy is to have is to strengthen him in his ministry of witnessing for Christ.

Let's look then at these three words briefly. I'll look a little more in detail at the first and the last one. We'll slate love here only because perhaps you've heard more on that than these other two.

But let's look first of all at the gift of power. Not the gift of timidity. God hasn't given us that but He has given Timothy something I think He's given us all, an element of power. Now there are a number of ways of looking at that. Just follow along my line of thinking and then as we try to relate it some passage of Scripture, see if there isn't something here that might be helpful.

There are some lessons here that I have learned in part and I'm still struggling to appropriate in many of the decision making responsibilities that I have. I think what Paul is suggesting to

Chase – Competitiveness in the Church

Timothy is, 'Timothy, in the light of the circumstances you see around you, in the light of the perilous conditions that are coming before you, Timothy, you can do something.' And I think that's the key. Timothy you can do something. Sometimes we think of that Greek word for power "dynamis" from which we get dynamite. We get all excited about this fantastic thing that we're going to do.

Most of us I think are more like Timothy, where if we really catch a glimpse of it, we would begin to do something. Because most of us get excited I think of this tremendous dynamite power that we're supposed to have. And then when we have that we tend to use it often as a club over others. But look for a moment as we open this passage up just a bit. Paul is suggesting that we can do something, that Timothy can do something the lives of individuals who are there.

Yesterday we had on our campus Ambassador Sullivan who was the last ambassador to Iran from the United States and saw the transition from the Shah of Iran to the Ayatollah Khomeini. He'd also seen the transition of power in Southeast Asia as he worked with Henry Kissinger as a special emissary in the negotiations with the North Vietnamese at the close of the Vietnam, Vietnam conflict.

We were talking with him at lunch and ask a couple of questions about what he feels concerning the world and what it's like ahead. He says he's somewhat optimistic for the United States but he's rather pessimistic for the world. He commented on the fact that there are individuals who now controlled nuclear warheads and how are they going to use them and that proliferation in essence frightens you. And I suspect it would all of us because there is power. There is latent

Chase – Competitiveness in the Church

power stored away that can be pulled out and used it whenever you want. God's power is not latent power that we can pull out and use it when he want-, when we want. It's always His and only given power when we use it properly.

And there are times when I use power, I suspect there are times when pastors use power, there are times when you use powers in your Sunday school class, your youth work, and so forth and you're using your power because of your position to set people straight. But I don't think that's God's power as I understand it here. God's power is governed in a very special way for particular purposes as we'll see in just a moment. How Paul use it and the purpose for which it was intended. But there's always a blend it seems to me or a delicate balance to be achieved between humility and power. And you will find many times when it's difficult to blend those effectively.

Now in some areas we have no problems whatsoever. The other day I was sitting in the cafeteria and talking with one of the college students and somebody came by and interrupted our conversation a moment to urge him to make sure he was at the ball game that night. And I said, "What ballgame is that?" and he says, "Well we've got a team in the intramural softball scheme here." And I said, "Well how are you doing?" He says, "Well we're 0 and 4 but," he says, "we're getting better." He says, "The first game we lost by about 16 runs," he said, "it's down to about 10 runs. Tonight we hope to close that gap tonight."

He didn't have too much problem with humility because he had had four graphic lessons that other people had the problem of wrestling with humility because they were the winners. But he had no problem at all. And you really do not have difficulty with humility until you have a

Chase – Competitiveness in the Church

measure of power that you can use. That's why power is so dangerous because sometimes we don't know how we're going to handle it until it's ours.

And that's why many an individual who will go through Talbot seminary will somehow or other be just the nicest individual you ever saw until he or she becomes involved in some Christian role or leadership and all of a sudden they seem to be a different person. Because they can do something. God has given them a measure of power to go with the office that they have. Then the problems of humility arise because up until that time perhaps very little was needed to counterbalance whatever it is that they were able to do.

Some individuals have gifts that develop early. Some of them bloom late. Some of them are in positions where it's difficult to use their power. There are a lot of combinations. But I'm just suggesting that Paul is telling Timothy, 'Timothy despite the circumstances you can do something. You can make a difference.' And I want to put power in that context rather than 'I am so powerful. I'm going to set everybody straight.'

Now I say that because I think that our own competitive society gives us a nudge in that direction. Notice if you will, who gave us the power. Paul very clearly in mind builds upon this as he moves on, and then jumping down because of time, in verse eleven, "For which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher." He was appointed, the power came from God. And sometimes as you stop and reflect back and say 'Where did the power come from?' It gives you a better idea of how that power is to be used.

Chase – Competitiveness in the Church

And the Apostle Paul, the one who spoke with humility of grace, the one who told us that we ought to consider the other person better than ourselves, is the same one who recognized that the power that he had as an apostle came from that same humble one, Jesus Christ. You put that all together and it begins to teach, it seems to me, a lesson.

As I sit in my office up there in the corner and how I should use the power of that office upon this campus. And it gives you it seems to me a great deal of concern how we are to do the things that God wants us to do in this life and to do it in such a way that we recognize that it is for Him and never for self.

About thirty years ago there was a pastor, oh about 80 miles from here in a small country church who had a youth meeting going and there was some cookies and punch set out in a table in the kitchen area. And then next to it was a recreation hall and the young people mostly juniors and junior high kids were having games. And a couple of the boys snuck around through one of the back doors and came back into the back passageway into the kitchen and were partaking of a few of the cookies and some punch without the pastor knowing it. The pastor happened to come through the kitchen door and saw them. He said just a few words and they basically were this, "Get out of this church and never come back."

One of those never came back. He was my brother. (Speaking emotionally, trying not to cry) Over the years I've shared with him. I'm sorry. And we see, we see a glimmer. We see a glimmer of light now. And I've taken years to tell him that Jesus Christ does not like that pastor. That pastor had power but the power that that board gave him was to save souls and not protect

Chase – Competitiveness in the Church

cookies. And so many times in life, we're protecting cookies when souls are at stake in how we deal with lives. Paul says you've got power, but power to change the world for Christ not power to make yourself look good. Not power that you can throw around because somehow or other you want people to think you're pretty good or a little better than somebody else.

I struggle with this up in my office. Somebody would come to me and say, "Did you know such and such?" If I say, "No, I didn't." The tendency then is, "What kind of a president we have? He doesn't know everything." Extremely difficult. But I've learned to say, "No I don't know, what can you share with me about it?"

The power that you have is given to you by Jesus Christ to transform lives and not to make yourself look good and not to win a battle for yourself but to win a battle that individuals might come to Jesus Christ and might be strengthened in the faith that they have through Him.

Let's quickly move on. The gift of love that is here. Just briefly. It doesn't temper our power.

That's not the purpose of it. I don't think. Instead of tempering our power it directs the power. It is saying who are individuals that need to be loved?

And Paul was telling Timothy there are people in this day that need to hear so preach the Word and be instant in season and out of season. And as Paul talks with these people, he's telling them that that love that you see in your life from Christ ought to be transferred to others about you.

Chase – Competitiveness in the Church

And so you're always seeking to use the power of the Gospel for the benefit of others and never for self. Isn't that the divine pattern? John 3:16 "For God so loved the world."

And then that's followed through because Paul is pointing out here, notice if you will in, in this same passage of Scripture in verse ten, "But now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus who abolished death and brought life and immortality to the light through the Gospel." When you have a Gospel that will transform individuals from death into life, you've got a motivation of love that's all powering. No wonder Paul was driven, not only because of the love of Christ in his life because of the heart that he had for individuals that he saw about him.

So in every way, shape, or form he was bending every effort possible to use responsibly the power of the Gospel that was his. And he recognized that any office that he held was an office that was his because of the power of God in his life because he was dedicated to the service of Jesus Christ. And you as you stand before individuals in youth meetings, with a pen in your hand as you write for publications regardless of where you are for Christ as you graduate and leave or as you served during the summer you have no power to push people around, but you have a marvelous power to transform individuals.

But the love that Christ has shown in your life ought to be the love that you see transforming your life so that you might use that power in an effective and a very strong and possibly in a way that will change lives.

Chase – Competitiveness in the Church

Those of you who have been in classes where counseling is discussed know that sometimes as parents we discipline out of anger. But sometimes as administrators perhaps as students or teachers or pastors or you name it, we also take action because we feel that we are disciplining but sometimes we do it in anger.

Years ago I talked with a pastor who had taken a church again here in the Southland there was a tremendous transformation in that church. By that I mean the vast majority of the people left. I have to ask him, I says, "What's happening over there?" He says, "We're cleaning out dead wood." Oh. I wonder if Jesus Christ would have cleaned out that dead wood or if He would have sought, how can I transform them? Is the purpose to get the individuals there so that they can hear the message of salvation? Sometimes there are cantankerous individuals to work with because maybe they feel they have power and they're going to use their newfound power as head of a deacon's board or something like that.

It may take all the grace of God that He could possibly give you and it may take the love and it may take a constant daily reading of First Corinthians 13 and a hundred other passages that focus on that before you have the ability to witness and to deal and to be effective in the life of that individual. Moving by love, being moved, being motivated, by love.

Just one sideline, I was talking with somebody on this campus oh it's been several months ago and he was talking about tension and occasion came up recently when a similar situation came up and I thought of a book I read some time ago. I don't believe this person is a Christian. He's a Canadian physician. His name is Hans Selye. And he wrote a book entitled "Stress without

Chase – Competitiveness in the Church

Distress." And his thesis was this, that in life there is stress but on the basis of his observations and a great deal of research and the book is rather heavily packed with some interesting things along this line, he pointed out that those who learned to take stressful situations that are part of life and invest their life in the changing of those stressful situations, not for the betterment of yourself but for the benefit of others who are involved, that you can live in a healthy fashion with stress. Hence the title of the book "Stress without Distress."

And we cannot get rid of stress in life, but if we're always interested in protecting ourselves and our flanks to make sure that we look good then we have stress with distress. But if we look in those situations and say, "Motivated by love, how can I use the power that God has given me for the benefit of others?" Then I think perhaps, perhaps a poor illustration but in a secular vein we have the stress without the distress. But in a spiritual sense we have the peace that passes understanding.

Time is getting away. Just the last point, crucial one that I wanted to make. It's the gift of discipline or perhaps more correctly even the gift of self-control. The cluster of words that is used here or the word that is used here and translated discipline comes from a word that is rich in history. Combination of two ideas "sōs" which means whole or sound or complete as it were. And then "phrēn" which is not, they could have used mind in fact we do have a word that used in classical literature that, that couples the soundness with the concept of a mind the intellectualist, sound mind. In fact an indiv-, an individual who is not mentally competent they put a alpha in front of that and so that means a person who is not mentally competent.

Chase – Competitiveness in the Church

But that is not the pattern here. The "phrēn" idea is one we get in such words as "sōphrosynē", a noun form or (inaudible) "sōphronizō" which is the verb form in which the particular noun form here in verse seven comes. It refers to a soundness of the totality of the being. It's kind of. It wraps together the intellectual concepts with all sense perception. It's a rather strange word. Many times the Greeks would break things apart. Sometimes they would pull them together and this particular phrase historically in Greek literature really pulled it together.

Now words do change but the interesting thing is that this was a rich word was one of the four cardinal virtues. It is found in literature laced throughout the day and the age in which the Apostle Paul lived and wrote it is found in Tarsus literature from there. Tarsus was a center for kind of the Greek and Roman teachings particular in this area. And Paul undoubtedly had run into that word hundreds of times.

It's a concept disciplining yourself and being very careful and there's some rich illustrations, I won't go into them now but just one passage of Scripture that gives us an insight into how this can be used again by the Apostle Paul. Blending it now with the concept of the power that we have in faith of doing something for Christ. Turn if you will to Romans the 12th chapter.

While you're turning there, just recently I was talking with my brother and we're trying to make some progress as we have for 30 years and it's been kind of heavy. So if you'll remember me in prayer as I work with him.

Chase – Competitiveness in the Church

All right in Romans the 12th chapter you will notice that in verse, verse 3 Paul blends now and kind of on a play with word the concept of faith that is wrapped up in here. Notice the last phrase: "Each a measure of faith." The whole passage tied into the kind of living we ought to have in these days in which we live. Then notice if you come back to verse three, the first part of it. "For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think." There is a play on words there instead of "sōs" being combined with the basic root "phrēn", "hyper" is combined. And those of you in Greek know that that just reverses the meaning.

Instead of a sound or a whole concept of the totality of a person being in control of a situation for the glory of God. You've got a person who is overwrought. You've got a person who is so excited with his intellectual capability and his understanding that he moves ahead. And friends, I have wrestled with that and I suspect that some of you who are youth pastors have wrestled with that. Some of you who are pastors now in churches have wrestled with that because the power of stand behind a pulpit in a local congregation and hoping the Word of God is a tremendous sense of power. You can get back at poor Deacon Smith who crossed you in last board meeting or Nancy Jones who somehow or other did something at the last tea and on and on it goes. And some of you have sat in those kinds of situations. What a power that is there.

But then notice in contrast to that "hyper" concept the "sōs" comes back. "But to think as to have sound judgment," are same basic words, same concept, "as God hath allotted of to each a measure of faith." Tied in with faith, but notice it's the faith to each person. Those of the household of faith, those who really know Christ, who are really in that church serving and

Chase – Competitiveness in the Church

working in a marvelous way, Paul is suggesting to them and those in leadership recognize that God deals in different ways with different individuals. And somehow or other try to pull together then that element of control that ought to be in your life or the household of faith. And beyond that for the borders beyond even the household of faith to witness effectively for Jesus Christ.

In Greek literature, there is the story that is true of the use of ostracism. It started in the sixth century. There were individuals who were coming to power, who had nothing wrong with them at all. They were fine individuals and I think not unlike many of the graduates that will go across our platform in just a couple of weeks.

But those individuals lacked one thing and it was self-control. And so a process was established whereby an individual could be ostracized from Athens for 10 years if they did not demonstrate the principles of self-control in their life. A tyrant was not necessarily an evil man in their day because they needed strong leadership and many of the churches here in the Southland are growing because of very strong, very vibrant, effective leadership in the pulpit.

But to the Athenian, the individual who had everything going for him without self-control, he couldn't be trusted. And so they sent him out of Athens for ten years to cool his heels. The practice grew in the fifth century and they began to have yearly straw votes and they had a straw vote to decide whether or not they wanted to have the regular vote to see whether they ought to send somebody away. Now if they move to the regular vote, sometimes it would take over three thousand votes for an individual to be put out of Athens, but they voted on broken pieces of pottery. And a broken piece of pottery in the Greek is called "ostraka". And their names are

Chase – Competitiveness in the Church

scratched on them and to this day there are still numerous remnants of the "ostraka" that can be found with names scratched on there. And a won-, the person who won the election, "ostraka", then ostracized.

And I think in a sense that God has given us unique responsibilities with His power to be used motivated by love and conditioned by self-control or discipline so that we not think of ourselves more highly than we should. In my responsibilities pray that this kind of attitude will be learned and put into operation and not in any way shape or form alter the basic fundamental, essential commitment of this institution. But that always it will be dealt with in that fashion. And pray for the graduates who go forth from this class that that'll mark their lives. And if we could learn from Paul as we trust Timothy did learn what a transformation would take place in your life, in my life, on this campus, in the Southland, wherever we go for Christ.

Our Father we're thankful for this time together. Guide and direct as we reflect upon your word. Apply it, our Father as You would have it applied. Blot out those illustrations or references our Father that I have made that are not productive or perhaps may be misleading. Grant above all that Your Word will be implanted in our lives for our benefit. For we ask it in Jesus Christ, amen.