

What Has God Commanded?

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.? (1Ti 1:5-11)

Typically we leave the term "commandment" in this lesson in a generic setting; God has generally commanded certain things. Contextually we should not leave the passage so void of specifics. In the first verse of this letter Paul indicates that he is writing to Timothy "by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ." The contextual presence of this term links our study verses directly to this opening statement from Paul, and requires that we view our passage as a specific explanation of Paul's intent in writing First Timothy. It tells us what the Holy Spirit intended with the letter from Paul to his young helper on behalf of the Ephesian church.

Only in the Galatian letter do we see such abruptness in Paul's openings as appears here. Although we see no hint that Paul is upset with Timothy, we do get the impression that he has a profound conviction of need to address; to correct a problem through Timothy's ministry at Ephesus. Timothy is not the pastor at Ephesus, but was rather left there as Paul's spokesman, assigned to correct certain problems that Paul discovered during his last visit. The absence of a paragraph that acknowledges thankfulness for Timothy or other such pleasantries further leads me to conclude that Paul's letter to Timothy has a specific purpose to confront and to correct problems in this church.

Since we recently studied Second Peter, we should make an obvious notation of the differences in form or structure between Paul's concern for false teachers at Ephesus and Peter's concern for false teachers among his readers. Before confronting the false teachers, Peter establishes the positive factors that will assist his readers in avoiding the problem of false teachers. Then in his second and third chapters he confronts the false teachers with disarming directness. In First Timothy Paul confronts the question of false teachers immediately. The subsequent themes of the letter that appear in significant details cover practices that will ensure a sound and healthy church that is capable of avoiding the snares of false teachers. Thus in Second Peter we see the positive emphasis first followed by the negative. In First Timothy we see the negative set forth at the outset, followed by the positive.

In both Second Peter and First Timothy we see the character of the false teachers emphasized more directly than their teachings, though in First Timothy we see more of the doctrinal content of the false teachers than we see in Second Peter. From Second Peter we gather that Peter views the false teachers as depraved—in fact likely unsaved—men who are to be rejected by the church as clearly as their teachings. In First Timothy we sense that one of Timothy's charges is to confront those who are teaching false ideas with the idea of recovering them. I believe that this difference accounts for the fact that overall First Timothy is far more positive and constructive in its tone than Second Peter. Paul wants no one at Ephesus to doubt that Timothy is his representative and that both Timothy and the church are to know without question what Paul teaches and expects them to teach. Apostolic authority clearly

appears in his tone to Timothy, but the intent consistently appears that Timothy is to carry this message to convince those in error, along with the whole church, of Paul's teaching and their responsibility.

"Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned." Godly teaching must grow out of a loving heart both in the teacher and the taught. Regardless of other lessons we may gain from Jesus' interrogation of Peter after the resurrection (Joh 21:15-24), we cannot avoid the obvious point that the man who teaches God's children with authority and blessing must do so out of a loving heart, love first and foremost for the Lord Jesus Christ, but also love for His "sheep" and "lambs." Teaching conviction must further grow out of a pure, not hypocritical, heart. The man who teaches must believe what he teaches to be God's truth. He must not teach with guile. He cannot intentionally mislead those whom he teaches. It is possible, though deplorable, that a preacher-teacher may intentionally mislead people to believe his errant teaching. Paul will not allow such equivocation in a teacher. A preacher should use tact, grace, and diplomacy, but Paul forbids the use of intentionally deceptive guile.

Secondly, the godly teacher must teach out of a "pure heart." He must strive to practice what he preaches in his own life. He cannot rationalize a habit of non-compliance in his personal life with the gospel that he teaches from the pulpit.

Finally, the godly teacher must teach from a perspective of sincere, not duplicitous faith. Faith in God and authentic belief in the clear message that he teaches must characterize his whole ministry.

These three divinely inspired filters must remain constantly in the mind of the wise teacher if he is to effectively teach and lead believers in their faith and conduct. They challenge not only the teacher's words and actions, but they equally probe his motives. Those who preach should carefully screen every message—before preaching it, not afterwards—through these tests.

Once Paul sets the filters in place for the motive and content of the godly preacher-teacher he is prepared to begin his examination of the false teachers at Ephesus. Everyone who fills the pulpit should do so from these foundational principles, but some do not. What is the likely motive or outcome of a preacher who fails any one of these tests? *"From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm."* Paul's first descriptive term is "vain jangling." This term is generally defined as simply "vain talking;" Trench is more specific, "that 'talk of fools,' which is foolishness and sin together." His next point confronts the spirit versus the content of the false teaching. They desire "to be teachers" of the law, but they are void of understanding either the law, which they falsely claim as their authority, or the content of their teaching from the law. This clause raises a relevant question. Is a New Testament gospel preacher's primary objective to "teach the law"? We need not probe the tension between Old and New Testaments or law versus grace to address this question. What is the primary content of a healthy New Testament gospel? Whether we study the abbreviated copies of sermons from Acts or the theme of the various New Testament letters written by inspired men to various churches and individuals, we readily conclude that the Incarnate, crucified, risen, and ascended Christ is to be the constant pillar of every gospel message. Aside from personal character and qualifications, these false teachers at Ephesus had the wrong objective in mind. If they were marksmen on a target range, they would fail for they aimed at the wrong target. Their preaching aimed at the wrong objective.

Rather than allowing us to think that he was in any way antinomian, against the law as if it were something odious, Paul quickly focuses our attention to the divine intent in the law. God gave it, not as something to be despised and opposed, or to be neutralized into something irrelevant as the typical antinomian perspective teaches, Paul affirms that the law came from God and had (even has) a divinely approved purpose. God intended the law for at least two functions. First, based on Paul's letter to the Galatian churches, the law was designed to draw a fairly detailed analogy of the moral perfection and

the priestly work of the Lord Jesus Christ, a “schoolmaster” to bring the chosen nation to Him when he arrived in human form. Secondly, as Paul outlines in our study passage, God intended the law as a clear outline of His moral character, and the moral character that He expects us to live and to urge in others. This premise explains Paul’s approach to the law in our passage. There is nothing in the law to which a godly believer should object. God intended it to confront sinners and to leave stubborn sinners without excuse in their sinful conduct. Positively, the law depicts the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Negatively, it defines sin and leaves us with a constant reminder, “carved in stone,” that God has imposed certain absolute “commandments” upon us regarding moral conduct. He did not give the law as a list of “helpful suggestions,” but as absolute moral commandments; “Thou shalt...” and “Thou shalt not....”

“...[A]nd if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.” We may legitimately engage the question as to whether New Testament believers should view themselves as “under the law” or not. Paul makes an informative case on this question in Romans 6. *We may not wisely dispute that the moral implications of the law are as obligatory upon New Testament believers as Old.* There is no moral or ethical conflict between the law and the gospel, between the Old Testament and the New. May we wisely respect the divine intent of the law in both particulars, and may we carefully hear its message regarding our Lord Jesus Christ in both His sinless person and His perfect sin-covering work. For a person claiming to be an authoritative teacher in the church to imply conflict or to misuse the law is, according to Paul in this lesson, inexcusable.

Paul’s ultimate authority for his teaching was not the law, but “according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.” The gospel, not the law, was the basis for Paul’s epistemology, his source of knowledge and authority. The law reflects God’s moral character and His commandments to man. New Testament moral and ethical teachings harmonize perfectly with the moral content of the Mosaic Law. However, Paul rejects the notion that a preacher should “take the hearer to Sinai before showing him Calvary.” This is more the doctrine that Paul opposes than what he affirms. May we follow this wise and inspired man and his teachings.