

Keeping the Charge

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Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith (1 Tim. 1:1-4).

Paul had been commissioned by the resurrected Christ to teach the Gospel. For him, there was no greater purpose in life. He had been entrusted with the message of salvation. He did his best to communicate this urgent news and ensure its purity. As he taught other people, Paul insisted that they handle this message with the same reverence and care.

Paul was deeply concerned with how the Gospel would be treated in Ephesus. Upon leaving the church at Ephesus, he warned the elders about some who would teach error. Some would come from outside the church; while, others would come from within the church. To successfully engage these false teachers, Paul committed them to the word of God's grace (Acts 20:28-32). Firm adherence to the Gospel would protect them.

As additional insurance for the saints, Paul left Timothy in Ephesus. Paul had a deep affection and unshakable confidence in Timothy's devotion to Christ. In the above-cited passage, Paul reminded Timothy of his charge. A charge is a command or instruction that is to be continually declared.

In the two letters Paul wrote Timothy, he warned him of this charge eight times (1 Tim. 1:3, 18, 5:7, 21, 6:13, 17; 2 Tim. 4:1, 16). Timothy was to relentlessly warn about the dangers of a false Gospel. If and when he encountered false teachers, he was to disprove their message with the truth.

The Charge & Us

Like Timothy, we must keep this same charge. We must insist on the preservation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We must reject teaching which is contrary to the doctrine of Christ. We must warn of the consequences of false teaching. We must use the Gospel to convince those who espouse error.

Regrettably, some saints are often apathetic towards keeping this charge. They do not think there is an urgent need to guard against error. Such a delusion is the first step towards embracing error. Yet, those who keep the charge are often criticized by other saints. Some have been accused of being dramatic and self-serving. In reality, keeping the charge is an expression of love.

Later in the chapter, Paul indicated that the aim or goal of this charge is love: “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions” (1 Tim. 1:5-7).

Love is the only acceptable motivation for keepers of the charge. This was certainly true regarding Paul. Throughout his time with the saints in Ephesus, he warned them night and day, publicly and privately, and with tears (Acts 20:18-38). No one could question Paul’s motives. He made personal sacrifices while in Ephesus as a demonstration of the genuine care he had for the salvation of the saints.

If our hearts are not right, we can be led away from the truth. False teachers are misguided in their motivations. Paul warned that certain people had swerved from love, a good conscience, and genuine faith. As a result, they wandered into vain discussions. They promoted error for self-serving purposes. Nothing good would come for them or those who believed their message. Therefore, Timothy needed to keep the charge. We must do the same.

If we keep the charge of the Gospel, we will be given purpose. Paul continued to write Timothy how the Gospel put him into ministry: “I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, 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” (1 Tim. 1:12-14).

The Gospel transformed Paul. Despite his sinful character, the resurrected Christ offered him mercy. He was given a new life. Paul became useful in the service of Christ. Likewise, the Gospel can transform us. Despite our sinful character, Christ will grant us mercy if we obey Him. We can become useful in the service of Christ.

While Paul was not proud of his past, he retold his story for a reason. He served as a living example of the power of the Gospel: “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” (1 Tim. 1:15-16).

Conclusion

As Christians, we have been charged with important responsibilities. The soul-saving message of salvation has been entrusted to our keeping. We must promote the truth. We must defend the truth. We must use the truth to discern the difference between good and evil (Heb. 5:14).

Today, too many false doctrines have captured the minds of too many people. With a love for souls, we must patiently persuade those who have been deceived by error (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

Elders, deacons, preachers, parents, and grandparents all contribute to the charge. We must support each other in keeping the charge.