

A Sober Charge, Part II

Call to Worship: Psalm 89:1-7

1st Scripture: Matthew 5:15-20

2nd Scripture: 1 Timothy 5:17-25

Hymn Insert- *10,000 Reasons*

Hymn Insert- *Speak O Lord*

Hymn #700- *Trust and Obey*

Introduction

In the context of exhorting Timothy to honor elders who rule well, Paul has also given Timothy instructions addressing how to deal with unrepentant, sinning elders. They are to be publicly rebuked before the entire congregation, ultimately leading to their disqualification from the office. And last time, we saw how Paul had issued a sobering charge to Timothy, exhorting him before God, the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels, to follow through with these commands without prejudice or partiality.

Following this, we considered how Paul added an additional safeguard for the church, and for the eldership, by commanding Timothy not to lay hands on (that is ordain) anyone hastily, but rather to diligently and patiently examine any potential candidates for the eldership, before bringing them into the office. This would serve to aid in preventing unqualified men from being brought into the office, sparing a lot of hardship later on. It would also prevent even good men from being ordained prematurely, preventing them from being puffed up with pride (and falling into the same condemnation as the devil), having little experience in growing in grace and humility. And so, Timothy himself, had a responsibility of ensuring that he properly examined and vetted any potential elders, who were to be added to the eldership at Ephesus. And should he neglect to exercise the care, here commanded by Paul, acting too hastily in fulfilling this task, he would share in the sins of any elders who should fall into grievous sin, bringing harm to the church. Timothy's own purity would be tarnished by his lack of responsibility in seeking to guard the eldership and the church from any potential unqualified men.

This morning then, we continue on with this same theme, but with the additional insertion of a personal instruction for Timothy, concerning his health.

I. A Personal Instruction for Timothy

"No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities" (vs. 23). Now, at first glance, this particular instruction begs a question, doesn't it? Because following this statement, Paul continues on with what he was just saying in the previous verses. Why in the world does Paul state this right here, at this point in the text? Wouldn't this be better suited for the end of the letter, or as a P.S. of some sort? Why *seemingly* interrupt the train of thought here, with this personal instruction? Well, believe it or not, this instruction is properly suited for the context, specifically, in light of what Paul has just said at the end of verse 22.

Notice again, Paul ends verse 22 with these words, "keep yourself pure." Last time, I had explained that Paul states this, primarily in this context, so as to affirm the assumption that Timothy, should he fail to properly vet potential elders, would share in their sins (if they fell away) and tarnish his own purity in the process. Well, it's also important to realize that, while Paul's charge for Timothy to keep himself pure in this regard (by fulfilling his vetting duty, responsibly) is suited primarily to the context, he is also exhorting Timothy to keep himself pure, in the broader sense, as well. That would include fulfilling the immediate charge, of course, which prompted Paul to give the command. But, it would also include the previous charge to rebuke unrepentant sinning elders, lest he share in their sins, by failing to correct them. And furthermore, it would also include a general call to purity in every area of his Christian life, as well. Now, it is not an uncommon thing to do this, is it? Do we not, at times, address specific issues in a broader sense, which deals with the specific issues under a broader umbrella that addresses many other issues? [Ill. We can exhort someone to have a particular respect for their elders. And then, we can add a general charge, which addresses that issue under a larger umbrella, by saying, "Avoid pride!" The mentioning of pride has a specific purpose here, but it also deals with the sin of pride in general]

Well, what then does this have to do with Paul's personal charge to Timothy, regarding drinking a little wine and not just water? Clearly, Timothy has only been drinking water because of his holy desire to eliminate any wrong perception that might be given to others, should he drink wine or alcohol (also, probably seeking to just avoid it, altogether). In other words, he

wants to avoid even the appearance of condoning the abuse of alcohol, especially as a great leader in the church, and he wants to go the distance in shielding himself from any possibility of tarnishing his sobriety. And to this end, he was seeking to preserve his own purity by abstaining from all alcoholic beverages.

But, Paul here wants Timothy to know that it would be perfectly fine for Timothy to drink some wine, especially as a means of helping him with his stomach problems. In fact, it would do Timothy much good to drink a little wine, unto the preservation of his health, which would enable him to better, effectively minister, without being hindered by constant stomach ailments. While Timothy's original conviction was thoughtful and good, he could loosen the boundaries a little, especially, if doing so, could help ease his pain, and enable him to minister more effectively. And so, Paul mentions this here (he adds this parentheses, as it were) because he wants Timothy to understand that Paul's charge for Timothy to remain pure, is not a charge for him to continue to abstain from all use of alcohol. It would be right, proper, holy, good and helpful for Timothy to take some wine, at least for medicinal purposes. Indeed, Paul goes out of his way to exhort him to do so, and intentionally, within this context, where he is charging Timothy to keep himself pure.

Needless to say, Timothy had pretty intense stomach problems, which Paul believed could find some sense of relief, with the help of adding some wine to his diet. That said, after adding this parenthetical statement, Paul then continues on with his train of thought, from the preceding verses.

II. Continuing With the Charge

Now, as we move on to verses 24-25, it will help us significantly, to read verse 22 again, because in verses 24-25, Paul is continuing to elaborate further on what he has just said in verse 22:

"Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure...Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden."

And so, what then is Paul saying in verses 24-25? Again, the context is key. He is explaining why it is imperative that Paul not lay hands on anyone hastily. And the reason he gives is this: "Not everyone's sins (not everyone's points of disqualification) are evident from the outset. Indeed, some men's sins are clearly evident from the outset, making it easy for you to judge their lack of qualification for the office. Their sinful behaviors and/or lack of eldership virtues precede them to judgment...to your judgment, as you are called to consider them. In such cases, it's a no brainer, you know that so-and-so is not fit for the office. However, there are others, whose sins (whose unqualifying behaviors and lack of eldership virtues) are not so obvious at the outset, but come out in due time, upon further examination."

"And likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident from the outset, but those who may not manifest them so clearly, will do so in due time. Eldership virtues cannot be hidden long. They will and must reveal themselves in due time." In all of this, Paul is elaborating on why it is important *not* to act hastily regarding bringing a man into the office of the eldership (laying hands on him). It comes back to the tree analogy. In due time, the tree will reveal its true fruit or lack thereof. It takes time and careful examination to determine one's suitability for the office, because not everything is clear from the outset. All in all, patient examination, accompanied by prayer and fasting, is a critical deterrent for avoiding bringing unqualified men into the office of the eldership. Again, the preaching alone cannot rule the day. The man's attitude and heart towards the people of God; his treatment of sinners, his evident self-sacrifice, his view of money, along with other observations, will help reveal the man's heart. And again, this does not guarantee anything, but it does greatly serve to help protect the sanctity of the office and the church as a whole. Many unnecessary harmful errors of judgment can be avoided by taking these sobering precautions.

Add to this, Paul's somber preface to the charge ("before God, the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels"); add to this the sobering reality that we can share in the sins of others and tarnish our own purity by being careless and hasty in these regards, and we can hopefully get a keen sense of how serious this matter is, not simply to the apostle Paul, but even more so, to God Himself! Recall Paul's fearful words of exhortation to the elders of this very church, back in Acts 20:28-31:

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. *Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.* Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears."

These types of intrusions had probably happened already, before Paul had written this Epistle to Timothy. Whatever the case, clearly, Paul was deeply concerned to these ends, and he wanted to be certain that Timothy shared this concern with him, as he was called to lay hands on and ordain elders in the church of Ephesus at this time.

And so ends Paul's charge, bringing us into the last section, addressing those who are to be honored, namely masters (by their bondservants), which Lord willing, we will consider next time.

III. Closing Thoughts and Applications

1) Recognize again the dangerous and false teaching of many Pentecostal charismatics, who would fail to recognize the sanctifying value of illness and suffering in the life of the Christian. They would wrongly claim that any form of sickness ought always to be related to a lack of faith of some sort. And because of this false teaching, many a suffering soul has been led to despair because of their inability to remove some form of ailment by means of their faith. And some would even go so far as to refrain from seeking any medicinal help for illness, believing that to be a lack of faith as well.

Here, we find that Timothy was not only ill on this occasion, but he frequently had some significant chronic form of stomach illness. We are not given the specific details, but it was serious enough for Paul to here address it. And interestingly enough, clearly, even the Apostle Paul, who had the gift of healing, was incapable of curing Timothy. Even at a time, when miracles were performed for revelatory purposes, it was not always the case that God would heal an individual. Indeed, Paul himself had a thorn in the flesh, which God used to keep him

humble. Also, in Philippians 2:27, we are told of a sickness that nearly took the life of Paul's companion, Epaphroditus.

And so, all of this to simply say that Christians do get sick, and that, in accordance with the sanctifying purposes of God. And, it is proper to pursue proper medicinal treatment, when necessary. Here, Paul tells Timothy to take a little wine from now on.

2) Recognize, that, while we may, at times, make certain amoral commitments as preferences for our own spiritual/physical well being, that there is a danger of turning such commitments into moral commitments, leading us to deprive ourselves of certain benefits that may actually serve to make our life easier and our ministry more effective. Apparently, Timothy, for noble reasons, had made a commitment to abstain from wine, and to drink water alone. However, in doing so, he may have been unnecessarily neglecting a healthy and legitimate means of easing his stomach illness, which in turn, perhaps hindered him from ministering as effectively. Who knows if he was laid up, at various times, because of his frequent ailments? And so, wisdom would prove that total abstinence in his case, could prevent him from achieving better health, and more effective ministry because of that better health.

Some of you may have strict dietary rules that you follow. Some may refuse to go to a doctor under most circumstances. Some may refuse to dabble with cold remedies or over the counter pain relievers or even prescription drugs of any kind. Some may refuse to ever use any form of vaccination. Whatever the case might be, convictions over these matters and others ought to be respected, but at the same time, there should be some liberality in some or in all of these areas, if violating your normal protocol can, in some way, truly help your quality of life. There is a place to ask the question, "Am I unintentionally hindering myself physically, which would hinder my ability to minister to others effectively, by embracing any particular, universal, amoral principle." Obviously, moral issues are a different animal. Generally speaking, there's no room for compromise there. I am speaking about amoral commitments and preferences.

3) Let us take to heart Paul's caution about placing men, too hastily, into the office of the eldership. While we don't want to go to the extreme of prolonging things to the point that no man could ever be brought into the office, let us see the great value of giving a man some time to exhibit observable fruit. And of course, we don't want to add to the qualifications, given earlier

in this Epistle, looking for a perfect man, ready to disqualify over every flaw found in the man (we all have flaws, don't we). But, overall, the qualifications must be met, nonetheless.

[III. My former job, where a woman seemed almost "angelic like" at the outset, but turned out to have very significant personality issues that were revealed over time]

Recognizing that we cannot see the heart, should further compel us to seek the Lord in prayer, concerning these matters. God has a way of revealing His will to the church, when the church humbly seeks Him.

4) Finally, Brethren, while we ought take the precautionary measures, here given by Paul, to heart; while we are responsible for faithfully guarding all that the Lord has entrusted to us, let us ever be thankful that our Lord Jesus Christ is sovereign over the church, the world and all things. He will always build His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against Him. He will save every last one of His sheep. Even with the continual opposition of the world, the flesh and the devil (ever present and opposing His church); even with an imperfect church in the present, which falls short in many ways, Christ reigns and He will prevail to the fullest extent, in accordance with His glorious will! Indeed the shortcomings of the people of God and the intense opposition of the enemies of the cross, will all, ultimately, serve His glorious plan of redemption, and He will and must prevail! Let that all the more motivate us in the battle. Let that all the more compel us to diligently be spent for Christ. His will, will be done, on earth, even as it is in heaven!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25