

The Charge to Timothy – Part 4

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Paul's greeting and charge to Timothy: confront those who teach false doctrine in the church
2. aim – to cause us to understand the importance of sound doctrine as central to godliness
3. passage – 1 Timothy 1:1-20

b. outline

1. The Greeting into the Charge (1 Timothy 1:1-2)
2. The Substance of the Charge (1 Timothy 1:3-6)
3. The Target of the Charge (1 Timothy 1:7-11)
4. The Basis of the Charge (1 Timothy 1:12-20)

c. opening

1. the **core** of the letter
 - a. open with a comment about the **difficulty** of the passage we are about to engage (**vv. 8-11**)
 - b. **principle: the church of Jesus Christ is defined by the boundaries of its doctrinal truth**
 1. not by its “warmth” or its “success” or its “size” or its “programs” or its “relevance” or its “worship style” or its “celebrity pastor” or its “cutting edge nature” or its “doctrinal looseness”
 2. the church *ceases* to be the church when it embraces as its central priority something “other” than apostolic truth
 - c. this letter is a **charge** to Timothy in this regard ...
2. the **substance** of the charge
 - a. the **nature** of the charge = challenge the **heterodoxy** that has invaded the church; restore sound doctrine to its core, and lead people away from the “endless speculations” that have detracted from the main goal of being a follower of Jesus (**i.e. what:** to confront error)
 - b. the **aim** of the charge = to speak and fellowship in love (**i.e. why:** because its loving to do so)
 - c. the **origin** of the charge = a pure heart, a clean conscience, and a *sincere* faith (**i.e. from:** the very character of Christ himself: *Christlikeness*)
 - d. the **target** of the charge (**i.e. who:** those who wish to control others)
 1. “*teachers of the law*” = those who desire to be authorities over others, governing the beliefs and actions of others, twisting what is good into something other than its original intent in order to hold others under their **power**
 - e. (**now**) what is the **method** they are using to bring this false doctrine into the church?
 1. we *briefly* started into this (it was interwoven into **v. 7**) – a sense of *assertiveness* by the false teachers in pushing their form of “truth” which is used to control the church and its people
 2. so, Paul will now bring this approach by the false teachers into the light
3. the difficulty of the next pericope (in some ways, an **exegetical nightmare**):
 - a. why does Paul jump into a discussion of the *value of the law* at this juncture?
 - b. what is the point he is attempting to make about the law in *relation to the church*?

III. The Target of the Charge (1 Timothy 1:6-11)

Content

c. the **method** to be targeted (vv. 8-11)

1. *why* such a focus on “*law*” by Paul
 - a. because Paul was a Jew, and Jews were *steeped* in law, both in schooling and in *everyday life*
 1. everything in Jewish life was governed by rules and regulations (even Jesus lived under law)
 - b. because Paul was trained as a *rabbi* – he was trained in memorizing, understanding, and applying the law *as a teacher* (**i.e.** as a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin)
 1. so that he could interpret the law and use it to govern the behavior of other Jews
 - c. because Paul was a *lawyer* – one who *practices law*: “involving the practical applications of abstract legal theories and knowledge to solve specific individualized problems” (Wikipedia)
 1. Paul recognized that the Mosaic law was central to both the life of Israel *and* to the (eventual) message of the gospel of Jesus Christ – he needed to *interpret* its value in the New Covenant

2. the importance of “law” in the Pauline corpus
 - a. Paul uses variations of “law” more than **x150** in his letters (**x81** in **Romans** alone)
 1. it is key to understanding great sections of his letters (e.g. **Romans 2-3**; all of **Galatians**)
 2. it is used three (3) distinct times in this pericope alone: “law”, “lawfully”, “lawless”
 - b. Paul builds significant gospel arguments around the concept of the “law”
 1. e.g. the law as the means of condemnation for both Jew and Gentile, the juxtaposition of law vs. faith, the law as an example of eternal truth, the law as representative of the very nature of God, the new law of the Spirit vs. the old law of Sinai, the law of life vs. law of death, etc.
3. the understandings of “law” in the Pauline corpus
 - a. the **natural** law – the moral and ethical code “built into humans” by virtue of the *Imago Dei*
 1. i.e. the natural sense of “right and wrong” that we possess simply by being human (a distinguishing mark of the human creature over all others; not “natural law” as in gravity)
 - b. the **formal** law – the codification of the natural law as given at Sinai, including the Holiness Code
 1. i.e. all of the various aspects of *morality* directly codified by the Decalogue, along with the moralities implied within other laws (e.g. sexual laws representing sexual morality)
 2. this is the most **common** usage of the word by Paul in his letters
 - c. the **informal** law – the application over 1400 years of the formal law to everyday Jewish life
 1. i.e. all of the various *interpretations* of the Mosaic law applied to Jewish life (**the Talmud**)
 - d. Paul often “shrank” all of these views (and others) into a single concept – the very nature of God imparted to us which distinguishes good from evil, and the just from the unjust
4. the value of “law” as seen in this Pauline passage
 - a. “*the law is good*” = fundamentally, the law of God (even when it is applied informally) is good
 1. it restrains evil, it establishes boundaries of behavior, it applies consequences when broken
 2. thus, *as Paul argues elsewhere*, the law of God (esp. in its natural and formal modes) can never be done away with – it will always apply in the world, *even to the follower of Christ*
 3. e.g. the “antinomian” tendency of some Christianity is *inconsistent* with this principle
 - b. “*if one uses it lawfully*” = rightly; correctly; in accordance with its *original* intention
 1. i.e. the interpretation and application of the law in a way *consistent* with its spirit and intention
 2. e.g. a lawful use of a speed limit law vs. its unlawful use by a vindictive police officer
 3. so, Paul *implies here* that the “*teachers of the law*” (**v. 7**) are *not* using the law “*lawfully*”
 4. e.g. the “legalistic” tendency of some Christianity is *also* inconsistent with this principle (↓)
 - c. “*not laid down for the just*” = the righteous; those who are *already* in accordance with the standards established in the law; the innocent
 1. (**apparently**) the false teachers were applying the law *improperly* to those who were already justified by faith – probably the same issue that Paul dealt with at so many other locations:
 - a. e.g. in **Galatians**, where the Judaizers were insisting that justification included keeping the *informal aspects* of the law; at the Jerusalem Council (**Acts 15**)
 - b. **note**: the issue always seems to be the application of the *informal law*
 2. (**problem #1**) does this imply that the law (in any mode) is *irrelevant* to believers? (↓)
 - d. “*but for the lawless and disobedient ...*” = those who are “*ungodly and sinners*” or “*unholy and profane*”; the reprobate; those whose *character* is such that these acts are *normal* to them
 1. the list is exemplar of the *entirety* of the **Second Tablet** of the formal code (i.e. the *horizontal* laws governing moral behavior between human beings)
 - a. the **5th** – “*those who strike their fathers and mothers*” – not honoring parents
 - b. the **6th** – “*murderers*” – committing murder
 - c. the **7th** – “*the sexually immoral ... practice homosexuality*” – sexual activity outside of the God-ordained, monogamous, heterosexual, life-long, covenantal relationship of marriage
 - d. the **8th** – “*enslavers*” – “stealing” others for the purpose of enslavement
 - e. the **9th** – “*liars, perjurers*” – bearing a false witness, officially or not
 - f. the **10th** – “*contrary to sound [healthy] doctrine [truth]*” – the overarching sense of *covetousness* that undergirds all other forms of behavior contrary to what is healthy
 2. **principle: both the natural and formal law, as given by God, establish precisely who the reprobate are, because these are the actions which flow naturally from them**
 - a. i.e. the law clearly establishes the *difference* between the nature of the reprobate and the nature of the just – the reprobate do all these things because it is their *nature* to do so
 3. (**problem #2**) does this mean that *any such act*, even by believers, makes one *unjust*?
5. the intention of “law” in this pericope (based on the two questions above)
 - a. obviously, Paul considers the law to be “*good*,” thus it has *deep and abiding value* to the believer

1. it can *never* be a means to our justification (that is only by faith), but it can be a *guide* to our behavior as those with the law “*written on our hearts*” (**Jer. 31:31-34**)
2. **the law, for the Christian, is the desire of his heart, the target or standard of living, the goal of holiness, the very nature of Christ to which he longs to be conformed (Rom. 8:29)**
- b. but, Paul never considered the “*law*” to be *condemnation* of the “*just*” – not “*laid down*” for them
 1. true, believers can and do violate the commandments of the **Second Tablet**
 2. but, their *standing before God* is not conditional upon their “perfection” in keeping these commandments throughout life – justification *continues in the believer* by faith *alone*
 3. **although the Christian may sin, the true follower of Christ hates his own sin, repents of it consistently, and strives by faith to be outwardly *what he already is inwardly***
6. the method of “*law*” by the false teachers
 - a. **conclusion:** the false teachers were using “*law*” (an informal variation of it) against believers, forcing upon them many new ways of “thinking”, designed to:
 1. conform the behavior of the church to their standards, and
 2. hold the church under their power, control, and direction
 - b. **those who focus the life of the church on things other than teaching**
 - c. **“warmth” or “success” or “size” or “programs” or “relevance” or “worship style” or a “celebrity pastor” or a “cutting edge nature” are all focuses other than doctrine, which are used to divert attention away from holiness and hold people “enslaved” to a form of “church” that isn’t a true church of Christ at all!**