

CHARGE CONCERNING DOCTRINE

I Timothy 1:3-11

I. Charge Concerning Doctrine. 1:3-20.

Ephesus was a populous and magnificent city on the main route from Rome to the East. It was a wealthy, cultured and corrupt community. Paul preached there for approximately three years because of the opposition and the opportunities. Consequently, he had a great interest in and love for the Christians there. He knew that it was important to stabilize the congregation in that strategic city.

When Paul set out for Macedonia, he challenged his assistant, Timothy, to remain in Ephesus and continue the battle for the truth. Evidently Timothy had other plans. It was only natural that he should want to accompany Paul. Because he considered it a most pressing necessity that his trusted friend stay on duty at Ephesus, Paul begged him to do so. It took Paul's pleading to get Timothy to remain there, but he stayed in order to try to straighten out what was wrong.

1. Danger To Sound Doctrine. 1:3-11.

The greatest danger to Christianity in Ephesus was not the fanatical worshippers of the goddess Diana, but from the false teaching within the church itself. Dangerous heresies were springing up within the church. Knowing that these heresies were deadly in their effects, Paul hit them as hard as possible in order to kill them. He knew that false doctrines always confuse and produce strife.

Paul's letter renewed his appeal that Timothy continue the work of counteracting false doctrine. He did not name the false teachers, but merely referred to them slightly as "some," as if to grant them no standing whatever. "Some" indicated that they were "not many." Neither were they as important as they thought they were. They were not "big shots," but merely "certain individuals." They were simply novelty-teachers, advocating something different from the messages from God which Paul had delivered. Of course, there were some people, as is ever the case, who gladly welcomed anything that was new or different. Immature or shallow minds, which have never made a thorough study of the old and the established, usually acclaim loudly the new about which they know little or nothing. Very often that which they consider "new" is simply an old heresy in new dress. Therefore, it is well to remember that false teachers never further the interests of the kingdom of God. Regardless of how interesting their ideas may be, they never accomplish anything in the spiritual realm or edify any believers in Christ. The perversion of sound doctrine always endangers the spiritual well-being of God's children.

Timothy was exhorted to do his best to restrain the errorists from teaching their false doctrines. The fact that he was commissioned to do all that he could to combat the efforts of the false teachers, who were leading church members astray, suggests that there was already in existence a recognized standard of Christian doctrine. If they were to refrain from false teaching, it was necessary for them to desist from wrong thinking, for the former is the result of the latter. Their false teaching did not consist so much in a denial of the essential truths, but rather it was an attempt to add to the gospel of Christ certain fruitless speculations called fables or

myths and endless genealogies. Paul never regarded the message which a minister is to deliver as a matter of human speculation, but rather as a divine revelation.

Never permit anybody to lead you into questioning God's Word. Frequently two people argue over some doctrine, and both are convinced that they are right. Neither is seeking any light whatever. Each is trying to impose his own ideas on the other. Nothing is gained by that. If anybody wants to know what God's Word teaches the Scriptures contain the answer. If somebody wants to argue, tell him goodbye and go somewhere else. Beware of those things which get people occupied with unprofitable questionings instead of feeding and building up their souls. Any kind of so-called preaching that raises questions all of the time is not of the Holy Spirit. Preaching from God's Word answers the questions of people and sends them out saying, "Now I know." Some people delight in arguing. Don't waste time with them. I have always enjoyed eating good meat, but I have never had any delight in picking bones. Timothy was instructed to warn the Christians in Ephesus to beware of those who delighted in picking the bones of vital doctrines, but never got but very little, if any, nourishment from the truth of God's Word.

It is easy to do the things which please God when we love Him supremely. One delights to please another whom he loves. So the Apostle says that the aim or end of the commandment which he was giving to Timothy is love. In executing the commandment which was being enjoined upon him, Timothy would sometimes have to say some very straight things and to take some stringent actions, but he was exhorted to speak and to act always in a spirit of Christian love.

This love which is desired must flow out of:

1. A pure heart.

Heart here stands for the totality of one's affections. Without purity there nobility of character is clearly impossible. Here we get down to the depth of us. Here we are faced with the matter of motive. What a good thing it is to have an inner being, a heart, released from all selfish and unworthy motives! Only a pure heart is capable of true love.

2. A good conscience.

Conscience needs to be well instructed and guided by right principles. One who has a good conscience has a consciousness of freedom from guilt, a grateful realization that there is nothing to spoil his fellowship with God or with others. Only a person who is at peace with God can have a good conscience.

3. An unfeigned faith.

There is a spurious faith. There is a misplaced faith. There is a so-called faith which consists only in the mental acceptance of a doctrine. Mental acceptance is a good thing as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. An unfeigned faith is the real thing. It is not hypocritical, but is exactly what it professes to be. It is a sincere trust of the heart. Therefore, it makes real to the soul the living Saviour.

It is God's will that His servant shall have a pure heart, a good conscience, an unfeigned faith, a clean life, and a willingness to preach justification by faith to all who may hear him.

Some, having missed the mark of spiritual soundness, have turned aside to vain chatter and empty arguments. Verses six and seven contain a scathing indictment of these self-appointed teachers of the law who did not have any knowledge of that which they professed to proclaim. They were so ignorant of the content of the sacred law that their words were meaningless. They certainly displayed their ignorance when they sought to add law to grace. This very fact proved that they did not know what they were talking about, because law and grace will no more mix than will water and oil; they are entirely different principles, just as water and oil are different substances. The law says, "Do this, and thou shalt live." Grace says, "Believe on Christ, and thou shalt live." Whereas law demands, grace bestows freely.

As a diagnosis of the situation in the church at Ephesus, God's Word points out two undesirable conditions which prevailed, and which were very closely related to each other, namely, Wrong doctrine and wrong doing. There is an intimate connection between what a man believes and what he is. Doctrine and doing go together. More often than we would imagine, religious error has its roots in moral rather than in intellectual causes. Frequently people refuse to believe great scriptural truths because they contradict the manner of life which is theirs.

We are taught here that the law is good if it is kept in its rightful place and to its proper use. On the other hand, the law is bad if it is in the wrong place. The danger lies in its misapplication. It is not primarily for the man who has found his righteousness in Christ. Rather it is for sinners who need to be rebuked, informed and warned. The law can show them what God's will is, how far short of it they come, and the consequences of doing so.

Paul was brought up under the law, but he was saved by grace through faith in Christ. The law was the schoolmaster or tutor which brought him to Christ, in order that he might be justified by faith. Paul wrote, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24). The law schooled Paul in the conviction of his own failure and inability. It did this by setting a standard before him which he could not reach. It brought knowledge of divine demands and his human shortcomings. It gave insight into the depths of sin and the unrealized possibilities of the soul. It wrung from Paul the cry, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24).

There are three lessons which the law has taught us that have been used to bring people to Christ.

1. We ought.

The law reveals the standard by which we should be living.

2. We haven't.

It has shown us that never for a single moment have we come up to God's ideal for our conduct.

3. We can't.

We just are not able to reach the standard.

This chapter catalogues the sinners whom the law can serve effectively with its revelations and warnings. The list follows the general lines of the Mosaic Law as expressed through the Ten Commandments.

1. Offences against God.

- (1) Lawless and disobedient -- "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." They live as if there were no law.
- (2) Ungodly and sinners -- "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image." They disregard the Lord's will.
- (3) Unholy and profane -- "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy." The unholy are the impious. The profane trample over the spiritual in their zeal for the secular.

2. Offences against others.

- (1) Smiters of parents -- "Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."
- (2) Murderers -- "Thou shalt not kill."
- (3) Fornicators -- "Thou shalt not commit adultery."
- (4) Kidnappers -- "Thou shalt not steal." Enslavers are included here, whether kidnappers of free people or stealers of the slaves of others.
- (5) Liars and perjurers -- "Thou shalt not bear false witness."
- (6) Covetousness -- "Thou shalt not covet."

The cure for unsound doctrine which always causes poor spiritual health is found in the glorious gospel of Christ. This gospel does not have to do with theories, speculations or guesses, but rather with three unmistakable and established facts, namely, Christ arose. This gospel was entrusted to Paul. He was faithful to that trust. He published the good tidings abroad. He never kept the gospel a secret. His impelling motive was threefold -- the need of men, the sense of trust and the love of Christ. "The love of Christ constraineth us" (II Corinthians 5:14). Any Christian who persistently takes in without giving out inevitably and eventually becomes a Dead Sea. Let us be faithful to our trust and proclaim the gospel to the unsaved as we have opportunity.