

A Sobering Charge

Call to Worship: Psalm 24

1st Scripture: 1 Timothy 5:17-20

2nd Scripture: 1 Timothy 5:21-22

Hymn #4- *All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above*

Hymn #87- *Holy, Holy, Holy*

Hymn Insert- *Before the Throne of God Above*

Introduction

In our study of Paul's First Letter to Timothy, we have been working through three sections, where Paul exhorts Timothy to see that particular individuals are honored. The first of these individual groups consisted of true widows, which we have considered already in Chapter 5:3-16. The second of these individual groups consisted of elders, which we have considered in verses 17-20 of the same chapter. Now, before we move on to the third group, it is important that we consider the additional content that Paul adds to this section that addresses elders. For, it is here that Paul adds a sobering charge, that springs out of what he has said in verse 20, concerning elders who are sinning and unwilling to repent.

I. A Sobering Charge

You'll recall that elders were to be honored in two specific ways, according to Paul's words in verses 17-19:

1) Those who rule well, and especially those who labor in the ministry of the Word, are to be worthy of double honor, specifically by providing for their financial/material needs. [Read vs. 17-18]

2) An accusation against an elder is not even to be investigated, unless the accusation is brought forth by two or more witnesses. [Read vs. 19]

That said, Paul recognizes the need to elaborate further here, because Timothy would need to know what to do, if an accusation brought against an elder (by two or more witnesses) is found to be true, and if the elder continues on sinning. And that leads Paul to state what he says in verse 20. [Read vs. 20]

It is this instruction, given here in vs. 20, which then compels Paul to state what he says in verses 21-25, beginning with this sobering charge in verse 21: "I charge you before God and

the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality."

Now, before we move on, into verse 22, I want you to notice two very important things about this charge, first the severity of it, and then, second, the reason for it:

1) Notice first then, the severity of Paul's charge. Beyond the shadow of any doubt, Paul wants to grab hold of Timothy's conscience here, with both hands. This is extremely important to Paul, and that is clear, because he takes pains to unveil the invisible, and yet, very real, presence of the heavenly counsel, before Timothy. Notice again, the severity of Paul's charge. "I charge you before (in the very real presence of) God AND the Lord Jesus Christ AND the elect angels..." And so, Paul is saying, as it were, "Listen carefully to this charge. Do not neglect to give your whole hearted attention to this exhortation, because if you do, you will be without excuse. This is an extremely important matter, Timothy. In the presence of our eternal God and Creator, in the presence of our Glorious, risen, Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and in the presence of the host of heavenly angels, who observe and minister to us on behalf of God, I charge you the following..." [Note: The angels will be present at the Final Judgment]

You see, this is not the type of charge that someone is just going to hum past and be indifferent toward. This is a "shake the soul" kind of charge! Now, that said...

2) Why does Paul preface his charge with such a severe and sobering statement? Well, let's look at the specific charge again, so that we can answer this question. "Observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality."

And so, Paul hoists this severe charge toward Timothy, calling him to observe; to give heed to and follow what Paul has commanded here, without prejudice and without partiality. Now, the question we ought to immediately ask is, "What things?" What is Paul so severely charging Timothy to observe that he has just gone over? Well, certainly, in a general sense, we could apply this to the entirety of the letter, as if, Paul were saying, "Timothy, everything I have written in this letter...do it! Let nothing hinder you from exercising great care in observing all that I have written here. In the presence of God and His heavenly hosts, I charge you to do this!" Now, while this would certainly be relevant in that broader sense, the immediate context, addressing the matter of sinning elders, would seem to especially bring this charge to the

doorstep of verses 19-20. In fact, verse 22, continues along the lines of this theme, all the more confirming that this charge is especially dealing with the immediate context (we will get to this verse shortly).

And so, what Paul is saying here is, "Timothy, guard the church, especially by protecting the sanctity of the eldership. Do not receive an accusation against an elder, unless it is brought forth by two or more witnesses. And if such an accusation is brought forth by two or more witnesses, and upon investigation the accusations are found to be true, and the elder refuses to repent upon being confronted, then rebuke him before the whole church. Timothy, I charge you before God and His heavenly court that you follow through with these orders. Don't let a fear of man lead you to neglect this important duty, lest you be held responsible for the defilement of the whole church."

Now, back to the main question then. Why does Paul attach such a sobering and stern charge to these instructions regarding elders? Well, let me give you at least two reasons:

1- Paul recognizes that a breach in the purity of the eldership could be detrimental to the life of the whole church. If the leaven of unrepentant sin is to be purged out of the general membership, so as to eliminate the spread of infection in the body, all the more, it must be purged out of the leadership, especially because of the significant influence that the eldership tends to have on the rest of the body. [Consider the sin of Achan and its effect on the whole Israelite camp--lost at AI, because Achan took from the banned items at Jericho]

2) Paul recognizes that it is a difficult thing to confront sin, especially in those who have significant influence over the body. Timothy must be governed by a fear of his invisible God and not visible man, and only a constant reminder of the reality of God's presence will compel Timothy to confront sin in these ways, especially in the leadership. To be sure, this involves conflict, and no one naturally wants conflict. The fact that Timothy tends to be a bit timid, only makes him more susceptible to stand down in the face of conflict, or at the very least, compromise. But, compromising in a context where sin is left unchecked in the body, and especially in the eldership, again, could lead to the ultimate destruction of the church, altogether. And so, that is why Paul gives Timothy this sobering, severe charge! He wants to do all that he can to instill a superior fear of God in Timothy, which would provide him with every bit of

motivation and conviction to stand firm against sin, at any material or earthly cost. [Note the danger of prejudice and partiality in the church; flattery, position, financial contribution, longevity...etc]

This then, is what compels Paul to further command what he states in verse 22, "Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure."

Here, Paul provides Timothy with an additional means of helping to avoid creating situations that might lead to the downfall of elders and the potential defilement of the church. "Be extra cautious when ordaining elders and bringing them into the leadership of the church. Do not rush to bring men into the gospel ministry. Take extra precautions to ensure that they are truly qualified, lest, their speedy elevation into the position, lead to disaster, when they fall into some grievous sin, having not been properly groomed for, or even called into, the ministry." The pastorate must be guarded. And while there is no absolute guaranteed means of ensuring the consistent purity of a man, it would be a terrible thing to bring someone into the leadership, whose lack of qualification could have been discovered by the more faithful and diligent efforts of those who seek to bring the man in. Paul doesn't want Timothy to share in the responsibility of causing defilement and schism in the church, by bringing in a man prematurely, without properly vetting him and examining him carefully in light of the qualifications, given in chapter 3:1-7.

This is one of the reasons that Paul, in providing those qualifications, tells Timothy that a novice (a new convert) is not qualified for the eldership, because of his susceptibility toward being puffed up with pride, and falling into the snare of the devil. One who is fitted for the ministry must be a seasoned man, not only in his knowledge of the Word, but also in his growth in grace. He ought to have been stretched and humbled in various ways, equipped by personal experience, which comes, over time and through trials, so that he is better suited to teach others and to withstand the pitfalls of the enemy. He needs to have spent some time under the shoe of God, where his pride has been trampled out, so that he, coming face to face with his own weakness and frailty, might be driven to flee to Christ for His divine strength and grace. There, in his weakness, he will be strong (in Christ) and suited to fill the office. And so, Paul commands that a novice not be brought into the office, and that the ordaining of a man, not be

done too quickly, lest an unqualified or unseasoned man be put into the office, leading to his own downfall and a significant blemish upon the church. To be careless in the raising up of men to the office; to rush people into the eldership, is a sure recipe for disaster. And those who shirk their responsibility of protecting the sanctity of the office, share in the sins of those who fall, defiling their own purity in the process, by failing to be a faithful watchman over Christ's body.

There is no question that Paul is well aware of this great danger; indeed many of the painful challenges that he deals with in this very letter, address the poison brought in by those in influential positions. And so, he gives Timothy this sober warning to these ends. By tying Timothy's own purity to this responsibility, and by charging Timothy before God, Christ and the angels, he aims to strike at Timothy's conscience, so that, Timothy will do all on his part, to ensure that a breach in the church is not formed because of his own failure to take diligent heed in these regards. Indeed, if the enemy gets to Timothy, the damage could be catastrophic. And so, we can further say, that Paul is also guarding his own ministerial post, by properly exhorting Timothy to guard his. In other words, Paul is doing with Timothy, the very thing that Timothy must do, with those under his charge.

II. Closing Thoughts and Applications

1) Let us constantly remind ourselves that we are always in the presence of heavenly beings. In other words, Brethren, even when we are alone, we are never really alone. Our sovereign God and Creator, who never sleeps nor slumbers is always closer to us than our own shadows. Our Lord Jesus Christ, our beloved Savior and the King of glory always has His watchful eye upon us. Indeed, the Holy Spirit resides in us. And even angelic beings, who serve God's purposes throughout this world, are present all around us.

Paul puts this reality before the conscience of Timothy, so that it might help to serve as a compelling motivation for Timothy to exercise his responsibilities diligently. And Brethren, it would do us good, to ponder the same reality, as a means of motivating us onward to be diligent in the exercising of our God honoring duties, and also as a deterrent from freely toying with sin.

The fear of man is powerful, Brethren. Temptation can often be powerful as well. And so, if we are going to battle against visible, tangible realities that appeal to our flesh, then we

must work to strengthen the eyes of our faith, so that we can persevere and press on in the battle. A fear of God comes through remembering, and remembering is cultivated by constantly reading and meditating upon God's Word.

[To the unbeliever: Recognize, as well, that you are ever living your life in the presence of your God and Creator...and He sees and He knows everything, and He forgets nothing...and He is holy! The Gospel!]

2) Recognize, Brethren, that we can actually share in the sins of others, even when we are not directly involved in committing the actual sins. Here, Paul reveals that Timothy had a particular responsibility in ordaining elders in the church at Ephesus, and that by moving too quickly in seeking to bring men into the office, should they fall, he would be partly culpable for the damage that ensues, because of his failure to properly vet the individual.

Now, to be sure, you can do all the right things in vetting a man for the office, and he can still fall, or even prove to be a wolf in sheep's clothing. The point is, that, pains should be taken to give due diligence to properly examining a man, over time, before bringing him into the office. Now, what does this have to do with the members, in general? As part of the same body, we all share responsibility in holding each other accountable, and in striving to maintain purity in the church. And so, if you are aware of the fact that a fellow member of the church is entangled in some particular sin, and you do nothing about it, you actually bear some culpability for the damage that will be done to that individual and to the body as a whole, and most importantly, to the glory of Christ that is tarnished by that sin. To put it bluntly, brethren, "We are our brother's keeper." And so, should God reveal the sin of another brother or sister to you, you have the responsibility of working through the disciplinary measures given in Matthew 18, with that individual.

Now, that is generally not an easy or comfortable thing to do. But, let your fear of God and your love for Christ's church, guide you to embrace discomfort and difficulty, in your service to Christ. And if you are in a position of authority, be it, as an elder, a deacon, a ministry leader, a Sunday School teacher...etc, see that you recognize and own that kind of a responsibility, within the sphere of the authority that you have been providentially given.

3) When the enemy provokes a scandalous breach in the eldership, recognize that the resulting defilement can really spread far and wide, reeking great havoc on the church. Very rarely is there no collateral damage, when working through such breaches. Let this compel you again to pray for the elders of this church.

4) All the more, let us ever be grateful that the Head of the church is and always will be the Lord Jesus Christ! In my recent study of church history, I have come to see, that while there have been many godly examples, whom God has used in the advancing of His church, there is only One Christ! Even the best of men, through all of history, were men at best. And if my faith rested on any one of them, I would never last. God has chosen to advance His church on the backs of thoroughly imperfect men, and He is still doing that today. Recognizing that, leads you to be slow in drawing your heretic revolver out of the holster. But, it also drives you to maintain your focus, on the only one who could be designated as the Author and Finisher/Perfector of your faith! And that is not Martin Luther, John Calvin, Charles Spurgeon, Jonathan Edwards, John Owen, John MacArthur, Paul Washer, RC Sproul or Paul Tripp. It's our sinless Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25