

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Right Priority

I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Timothy 6:13–14, KJV 1900)

There is a right way and a wrong way to teach every Bible truth. Teach it the wrong way, and bad results surely follow. "But I taught the truth," the reckless preacher might object. And the Biblical answer rebukes with "*But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.*" (Titus 2:1, KJV 1900) What does Paul intend with "become" in this verse? "...to be fitting or right, with the implication of possible moral judgment involved..."¹

We occasionally use "become" when referring to a wardrobe "becoming" its owner. Apply this idea to moral and spiritual conduct, and you will get the idea. There is indeed a right and wrong way to do—or to teach—the right thing. Following this verse in Titus, Paul names godly outcomes in the lives of those who heard Titus speaking those things "...that become sound doctrine." We cannot expect such outcomes when we speak the truth in an unbecoming manner. A harsh, argumentative, or mean-spirited explanation of truth typically stirs rejection of the very truth you would like someone to believe. You spoke the truth, but your attitude urged people to disagree with you and think differently. God holds us responsible for both the content and the spirit of what we teach. Try a simple experiment. First, sing the first line of that beautiful old hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy" as properly as you can. "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty..." The words remind you of God and of His righteous and holy character. Now let's mix things up. Sing the first three words just as you did the first time. Then pause, drop the musical overlay, and say the words with shocked surprise, "Lord God Almighty." Do you not get a wholly different sense of the same exact words the second time around? We can speak truth with the attitude of a trained junk yard pit bull and turn people off. Or we can speak the same truth with the attitude of winsome grace and encourage them to embrace our teachings. Which will it be?

When believers in God decide to abandon godly truths and godly living, they will look for ways to rationalize their bad choice. Occasionally they

might try to minimize the consequences of the sin they've chosen. You cannot minimize God's chastening frowns when you choose to disobey Him. ***If you think the price of discipleship is steep, take the time to look carefully at the price of disobedience.*** Does Paul frame his words in our study passage in a way that leaves us believing that obedience or disobedience is really inconsequential? Quite the opposite; anything that he views with such gravity as to require this formal charge demands our top priority.

Take note. Paul in no way implies that our obedience to this charge is automatic or divinely programmed so that we cannot do otherwise. Nor does he use this or any other measure of obedience as a litmus test to prove whether we are "...really a child of God..." or not. Talk about trying to teach obedience the wrong way; these attitudes go off the map in the wrong direction. On one extreme of teaching godly obedience, we see the fatalistic idea that, if you are "...really a child of God..." God will cause you to do all these things. You are effectively a passive tool in His hands. On the other side of extreme error we see a scolding, threatening demand for obedience, or God shall surely punish you for eternity. Listen carefully to the way someone teaches Christian obedience, and you will learn a world of things about what that person believes regarding many other Bible doctrines. The framework of Bible doctrines is similar to a finely designed building. Every brick fits precisely in its proper place, and all the bricks join in harmony to make up the whole structure. Individual Bible doctrines are not isolated bricks in our hands. When we adopt errant beliefs, we intentionally misplace the bricks of our doctrinal building, and the outcome is a house of cards that cannot stand. Thus, all we need to do is listen attentively to the way someone teaches one doctrine, and we learn much about what he believes about other doctrines.

What is the correct Biblical way of obedience? How should we teach it? First of all, Paul leaves no option regarding the gravity of godly living. We must regard it as our life's chief objective, not some casual hobby to engage or to abandon at our whim. Secondly, neither cosmic robotics nor the threat of eternal fire is a Biblical incentive to godly, acceptable obedience. The single attitude that

¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., 626 (New York: United Bible societies, 1996).

Scripture approves for every act of our obedience is God's love for us, and our responsive love to Him in return. Paul did not write, "Divine coercion constrains us." Nor did he write, "Fear of hell constrains us." What did he write?

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead. (2 Corinthians 5:14, KJV 1900)

Do you want God to look down with smiles on your obedience? To respond to your labors with His, "Well done, good and faithful servant"? Two goals point you in that direction.

1. **Do what God directs you to do in Scripture.** Spend lots of time with Scripture and under sound, godly preaching. Scripture emphasizes both. Train your mind, heart, soul, and body to do what God specifically and repeatedly teaches in Scripture that you should do. Avoidance of Scripture and sound preaching will dilute your sense of what Scripture teaches and will therefore also dilute the quality of your obedience. Likewise, subjecting yourself to false teaching and preaching will slowly absorb into your mind and warp your sense of Biblical obedience and truth.
2. **Do it from the right motive and with the right attitude.** Obey actively from your heart because you understand Scripture's teaching regarding the heart of God. He loves you with an everlasting love that drew you out of the cesspool of sin and death and set you in His beloved family. That kind of eternal love fully deserves your lifelong and best obedience to show by conduct your love for Him. Only one motive brings God's smiling blessing on our obedience. His incredible love is so imbedded in us that we respond with a lifetime of righteousness to show our love for Him.

When Jesus stood before Pilate, He could have protested loudly that the Jewish leaders who arrested, beat, and falsely accused Him violated their own law in the way they went about their trial. He would have been right. He could have complained that they misrepresented Him. He certainly would have been correct. What in fact did he do? He "...witnessed a good confession...." He gave appropriate and convincing testimony of His character and work. He did so with kind grace, so much so that Pilate actively looked for a way to release Him. In this setting, Jesus serves as a powerful example to us. At times we may face delightful opportunities to speak of our Lord and our faith in Him. At other times, we may face the fires of hell aimed directly against us. We are no less

obligated in this second setting than in the first to give a winsome, godly confession of our faith. "*Give thee charge in the sight of God...That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable....*" The Christian who looks for the exit door to escape his obligation inevitably tries to minimize his behavior. Paul refuses to permit such a convenient escape.

...this commandment.... We've spent almost a year in these weekly studies regarding appropriate, godly behavior in the Lord's church. We've encountered one "commandment" after another. Not once have we seen an optional suggestion. What is "...this commandment..." of which Paul writes? I suggest that Paul's sequential "Flee, follow, fight" commandments (Verses 10-12) summarize his whole writing in this letter. They frame one comprehensive lifestyle commandment. Just as God summarized His Ten Commandments into two comprehensive principles, Paul in these two verses frames the whole of acceptable behavior in God's church in three interlocked behaviors; flee, follow, fight. We cannot effectively live the Christian life or achieve God-honoring behavior in His church by choosing one or two of these principles and ignoring the other.

At times I am both amused and frustrated when people refer to Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman (John, fourth chapter). The Samaritans engaged in a form of worship, but it dramatically contradicted God's form of worship that He gave to Moses on Sinai. Jesus could have gone into great detail to show this woman where her worship was wrong. Instead, He told her that true worship consists of two principle attitudes and behaviors. We must worship God in spirit **and** in truth. He didn't say we must worship God in either spirit or truth. He simply and clearly included both. The contemporary questions; "Can we worship God in spirit without truth? Or can we worship God in truth without spirit?" The first goal when someone confronts us with such silly questions should be to look at the passage and see it in its Biblical context. Jesus specifically defined how "...true worshippers..." shall worship God. (John 4:23) Paul no doubt understood that the people on Mars Hill (Acts 17) fell distinctly short of "true worship," but he also understood that they were in some way trying to worship God, so he described their actions, "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship...." (Acts 17:23) We may very well worship God ignorantly or falsely in either spirit or truth. But we can only worship God correctly when we worship Him in both spirit and in truth.

The whole Christian life, according to Scripture, is to be of one consistent, faithful piece of fabric, not little scraps that we pick up here and there and fit into our busy lives when we think it convenient. We should never approach Biblical worship as an option, but as a "commandment." How is your worship? How are you doing with this one comprehensive "commandment"?

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor