

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Clear Choices: Obvious Consequences

O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: Which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee. Amen. The first to Timothy was written from Laodicea, which is the chiefest city of Phrygia Pacatiana. (1 Timothy 6:20–21, KJV 1900)

Any man who has served as pastor has encountered the "Plea of ignorance." The words may vary, but the message is always the same. "Why didn't you tell me this was wrong? I didn't know." From that attitude, you can follow the erring person eagerly looking for someone—anyone—to blame for his/her sin. On occasion when I've heard this plea, I've reminded the person that I had in fact taught them, but they chose to forget it when faced with tough choices. On other occasions, I've taken the person to a deeper sense of the Holy Spirit's personal teaching. "Didn't your conscience remind you that this was wrong?" In almost every case, the person paused and confessed to the fact that he/she did indeed choose to consciously turn the volume of conscience's voice down and ignore the Holy Spirit's personal testimony.

"To the very end this letter is characteristically 'all business,' and except for some new language, this final charge merely summarizes that business."²³⁰ Although Paul's closing of First Timothy is conspicuously brief, a likely testimony to the gravity of what he wrote as he considered his son in ministry and the grave responsibility this young man faced as a preacher/pastor, Paul also includes an endearing touch, "O Timothy...." Paul summarizes his major emphasis that we see throughout the letter in these few closing thoughts.

...keep that which is committed to thy trust.... Paul's charge required Timothy to stand firm in the teaching and lifestyle that he had received from the Lord, confirmed by Paul's loving and fatherly tutoring. We find no ground for Timothy to modify the Holy Spirit's, or Paul's instructions. The passage makes no provision to apply one set of rules to the folks we like and another to our critics. The basis of a godly ministry must be consistently the faith of Scripture, not personal relationships or personalities, or—Lord forgive—political maneuvering or the siren song of popular appeal. The ethical rules of Timothy's life and ministry are to be applied to every aspect of his personal conduct, as well as his public ministry.

...keep that which is committed to thy trust.... Trust, the word emphasizes that Timothy's ministry is not his personal possession or attainment. It belongs to God who gave it to him. Timothy's conduct is not merely a matter of Timothy's personal preferences and choices. The ministry that he follows belongs to God. Timothy occupies and labors in it as a "Trustee." In any trustee arrangement, the controlling issue reverts to the owner of the trust. In this case, the owner of Timothy's ministry is the Lord. Logically—and factually—Timothy will not answer to Paul or other people for his stewardship, but to the Lord Himself. Notice this point in another passage.

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. (Hebrews 13:17, KJV 1900)

The reference in this context is to preachers/pastors. They shall give account to God. Paul describes to them in Hebrews 13:7.

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. (Hebrews 13:7, KJV 1900)

These men "...have spoken unto you the word of God...." Paul instructs the Hebrews to follow their faith and to duly regard the end, the outcome, of their "conversation," their whole manner of life. Paul affirms this principle through the Colossian Church to another young preacher.

And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it. (Colossians 4:17, KJV 1900)

Paul didn't dole out ministry to his friends. This otherwise unknown preacher received his ministry "...in the Lord." Paul teaches Archippus, as he has taught Timothy, to take heed to his ministry as a precious stewardship, received from the Lord. He is under divine obligation to fill it full of faithful service and integrity.

²³⁰ 230. Fee, p. 160.

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, 1 Ti 6:20 (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003).

Timothy should guard the truth of the Christian faith that God had committed to his stewardship by proclaiming it accurately and faithfully (cf. 4:12–14; 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:2).²

Paul warns Timothy of two major impediments to his faithful fulfillment of his stewardship.

1. ...*avoiding profane and vain babblings*. In this setting, Paul likely intended by “profane” the classical sense of the word; having to do with this world, godless and thus “profane.” When pastors or preachers begin to rely on the latest fads, the most popular beliefs of the day, or anything other than the faithful teachings of Scripture, they violate this principle. Rather than viewing such ideas as the latest gimmick or as the best idea since sliced bread, Paul views them all as “...vain babbling.”
2. ...*and oppositions of science falsely so called*. In the Colossian letter, Paul confronted and refuted a growing first century heresy that became known as Gnosticism.

“This last warning is apparently a reference to gnostic influence that was increasing in Ephesus. Gnostics taught that there was a higher knowledge available only to the initiates of their cult. Paul had already set forth his full rebuttal to their contention in his epistle to the Colossians. The appeal of these false teachers had seduced some in Ephesus who had wandered from the path of truth.”³

Aside from the profound errors that the Gnostics taught, they also built their teachings on an equally flawed foundation. They claimed to possess a superior knowledge, superior even to the knowledge and teachings of the apostles. They only revealed their supposedly superior knowledge to people who blindly joined their secret society. They refused to share their knowledge with anyone outside their number. Whether we are dealing with ancient Gnosticism or with contemporary secret societies, the notion of imposed secrecy contradicts every tenet of New Testament Christianity. Jesus refused such ideas of secrecy in His teachings.

Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, 1 Ti 6:20 (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003).

³ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes*....

secret have I said nothing. (John 18:20, KJV 1900)

...*oppositions of science*.... “The meaning here is, that Timothy was to avoid everything which falsely laid claim to being “knowledge” or “science.”⁴ Apparently the followers of this gnostic secret knowledge built their reputation on what they opposed more than on what they favored. In this verse, “science” refers to affirmed and documented knowledge or truth. In their pursuit of secret knowledge, these people actually opposed the only true spiritual knowledge available.

Scripture presents a finely balanced posture of truth affirmed and of error opposed.⁵ A sound and full gospel will follow that balance. However, beware when someone falls off this equilibrium either on the side of all positive or all negative. The person who ignores error and promotes a pyramid selling all-is-positive scheme will fall into grave error. He refuses to see error, even when it stares him in the face. The person who becomes almost paranoid and defines himself by what and who he opposes will likewise fail to grasp the well-rounded truth of the gospel. He will inform sheep, but he will not provide them much spiritual food. Scripture defines Satan as a grand “Opposer.” If he can convince the Lord’s people to ignore the rich food of the gospel and consume their energies opposing one imaginary evil after another, he has effectively derailed these folks from faithful godliness.

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.
(2 Thessalonians 2:3–4, KJV 1900)

Invariably, these folks will wrest one Scripture after another for their opposing purpose, so that they exalt their personal opinion and wrested view of Scripture above what Scripture, rightly divided, teaches. Notice Paul’s point, “...falsely so called.” We shall study this point further. An imaginary opponent or error is far more insidious than a real one, for it exists only in the mind of the person who imagines it. 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 describes our primary battlefield as existing in our minds. Our minds must unite with Christ before our lives can follow. As we follow Him, we discover His healthy balance and feed our soul—and our mind—a healthy spiritual diet.

⁴ Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible, electronic edition.

⁵ Example; the many passages that affirm eternal salvation by God alone and all of grace, not of works.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor