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Study on 1 Timothy 1:3-11

By OTTO E. SOHN

LATE in his career, in the early sixties, the Apostle Paul was able to carry out his projected visit to Asia and Macedonia (Philem. 22 and Phil. 1:25; 2:24), at which time he doubtless visited Crete, leaving Titus behind to supply the churches with pastors (Titus 1:5). Likewise he met with Timothy in Ephesus, upon whom he also prevailed not to accompany him to Macedonia, since evil forces were threatening to wreak havoc in the church (1 Cor. 16:9; Eph. 5:16; Acts 19:23 f.). Furthermore, the matter of staffing the churches with pastors and deacons needed attention (1 Tim. 3:1-10, 14-15).—In the section before us, the Apostle concentrates upon one specific problem, namely, that of the errorists in the Ephesian church.

Vv. 3-4.—We must at the outset point to the peculiar construction of this section. The protasis introduced by *καθώς* has no apodosis following it. The A. V. therefore adds "so do" in v. 4. Most commentators regard this as an anacoluthon, which may be resolved as was done in the A. V., or by regarding the instruction beginning at v. 18 as the apodosis. Others take the infinitive *προσμένειν* as an imperative, as is frequently done in the papyri, but not so often in the N. T., though examples are not wanting: *Χαίρειν* in Acts 15:23; 23:26; James 1:1-2; 2 John 11; *στοιχεῖν*, Phil. 3:16; *συναμιγνυσθαι*, 2 Thess. 3:14; *ὑποτάσσεσθαι*, Titus 2:9 (though this may be regarded as acc. c. inf. dependent upon *παρακάλει* in v. 6).—Robertson, *Grammar*, 943. The *πρός* in *προσμένειν* points to the problem at hand and adds urgency to the appeal of St. Paul that Timothy remain in Ephesus. Apparently the latter was anxious to go along, but finally yielded to the Apostle's earnest entreaty, *παρεκάλεσα*. When the flock is threatened by wolves, the shepherd must be on duty. Paul himself was not able to solve this problem, yet his promise to the Philippians did not permit him to delay (Phil. 1:25; 2:24).

The specific problem at Ephesus, then, was the disruptive activity of certain errorists or leaders, who apparently were still within the church, else Timothy could hardly command them to quit teaching

falsely and dabbling in idle myths and speculations. The present infinitive *ἐτεροδιδασκαλεῖν* denotes that their false teaching had become habitual on their part. Needless to say, the Apostle objected to the false doctrine of these men, not to wrong methods used by them. That situation could not be permitted to continue. Since this nefarious activity was going on even then, it is proper to translate: "that you should command certain ones to stop teaching falsely and giving attention to fables and endless genealogies."

Who were these errorists? St. Paul does not identify them, yet in v. 20 he mentions a Hymenaeus and an Alexander, who concerning the faith had made shipwreck. Whether he is referring to them here in v. 3 cannot be established. He merely speaks of *τιοῖν*, certain ones. Of Hymenaeus nothing further is known, except that his false view and that of a certain Philetus with respect to the resurrection is mentioned 2 Tim. 2:17 as a stumbling block to the faith of some. Alexander is likewise difficult to identify. Though it is not altogether out of the question, yet he would hardly seem to have been the coppersmith who so viciously opposed Paul, 2 Tim. 4:14; for Timothy would have had little hope of success in commanding him to cease teaching falsely. Presumably this Alexander was a convert who later became a victim of false doctrine, possibly the one mentioned Acts 19:33.—The men whom St. Paul has in mind were quite likely of a Jewish background or leanings, since they paid so much attention to Jewish fables and genealogies (cf. Titus 1:10-14). According to the "Book of Jubilee," they tried to fill in, or complete, deficiencies in the ancient ancestor records, which of course was a useless and hopeless endeavor, for which reason the Apostle calls them *ἀτέραντοι*, endless, interminable, adding that they present questions for disputings, *ἀτινες ἐκζητήσεις παρέχουσιν*, 2 Tim. 2:23. There was nothing certain or edifying about them. Furthermore, if we may assume that St. Paul has the same people in mind throughout the Pastoral Epistles, we may add that these errorists claimed to possess great mysteries, also with regard to the supernatural world, but which were mere fables. They boasted of their supposedly superior understanding and dialectics, 1 Tim. 6:3-5, 20; 2 Tim. 2:14, 16, 23; Titus 1:10, 16; they insisted upon traditions and food laws, v. 7; 4:3-5; Titus 1:14-15; they discarded marriage, ch. 4:3; they were

covetous and quarrelsome people, ch. 6:3-10; 2 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:10-11; 3:9; and leaned toward libertinism, ch. 6:9-10; 2 Tim. 2:26; 3:1-6, 13; 4:3. Nor is it improbable that Paul had some form of Gnosticism in mind, for all that has been said could have applied to this philosophy, which caused so much havoc in the Apostolic Church, esp. in the second century.

The present situation in Christendom is much the same. First of all, there are those who turn their attention to a literalistic interpretation of selected Bible portions, which then become their chief stock in trade. Then there are those who put a veneer of Christian terminology over vain and foolish Oriental philosophies, as is done, e. g., by various offshoots of New Thought. Or we find such as reduce Christian truth to a series of theological problems which must be solved by a dialectical process and, finally, those who attempt to re-interpret the Gospel in the light of some prevailing philosophy.

But such endeavors did not in St. Paul's day, nor do they in our day, contribute in the least toward the *οικονομία*, economy of God, proper management of God's plan, or program, for man's salvation, which is in connection with faith. The Revised Standard Version translates this term with "divine training, stewardship, or order"; Thayer with "administration, dispensation (the knowledge of the) dispensation of the things by which God has provided for and prepared salvation, which salvation must be embraced by faith"; L. Fuerbringer: "The dispensation of God for the salvation of men." — What St. Paul means to say is that such pointless and useless preachments and discussions strengthened no one in his most holy faith, but rather unsettled him. That is a characteristic of them. One of the major manuscripts (D) has *οικοδομή*, upbuilding, edification, which fits the thoughts perfectly, yet does not have sufficient warrant. This *οικονομία* is precisely expressed (ch. 3:15) as *πῶς δεῖ ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ ἀναστρέφεσθαι*, "how you must conduct yourself, how you must do things, in the house of God, which is the church of the living God," namely, for the promotion of faith and love. All other teachings, however, which are not based on the Word, or which give a false interpretation to the Word, are at best worldly wisdom, which does not promote Christian faith and love and also leaves room for endless debate, discussion, and difference of opinion.

Christian pulpits can give such doctrine no hearing.—God's dispensation for the salvation of mankind, which is the same today as it was in the days of St. Paul, calls for the emphatic and incessant preaching of the Word on the part of God's οἰκονόμοι, stewards, 1 Cor. 4:1. Everything that is in conflict with this plan has no right of existence in the Church.

The Apostle continues: Τὸ δὲ τέλος τῆς παραγγελίας ἐστὶν ἀγάπη ἐκ καθαρᾶς καρδίας καὶ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς καὶ πίστεως ἀνυποκρίτου. The δέ could be considered adversative to sharpen the contrast with the vagaries of the errorists just mentioned; yet the positive manner in which this statement is made takes care of that situation, so that the particle could also be taken as continuative. The question is: What does St. Paul here have in mind?

There are at least three interpretations of παραγγελία that suggest themselves. Literally, being derived from παρά and ἀγγέλλω, it denotes an announcement made at someone's side, hence a command or order. It occurs only here and in v. 18 as well as 1 Thess. 4:2. Thus it would be a synonym of ἐντολή, or νόμος, which, however, is not possible, since the Law of God, though it demands love, cannot produce it; hence it cannot be said that its τέλος, aim or objective, is to call forth love. "The law works wrath and kills." It is the ministration of condemnation, 2 Cor. 3:9.—One might also be inclined to take it as Paul's specific charge to Timothy to put a stop to the heretical teaching of the errorists, vv. 3-4, but that must be ruled out for the same reason. Timothy would not be producing love in the hearts of his opponents by silencing them.—The third and eminently fitting interpretation is "Christian ministry." Luther renders it: "Die Hauptsumma des Gebots ist Liebe," but then explains "*Gebot*" als "*neutestamentliche Predigt*" (P. E. Kretzmann, *Die Pastoralbriefe*). Or we might put it this way: The true end, or aim, of all pastoral activity is to produce and promote love, etc.—something which the proclamation of fables and genealogical guesses cannot accomplish. The term therefore includes what Jesus embodied in the words πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν, Matt. 28:20. This need not surprise us, since also ἡγήσις (νόμος, Law) is used to designate divine revelation in general, as well as the Gospel in particular, as in Is. 2:3, where it refers to that Word of God by which the Gentiles are brought

into the Church. See also Mark 1:1; Luke 24:44; Rom. 3:27; Gal. 6:2.

Thus *παράγγελία* does not signify the Decalog, in whole or part, but rather a commission, namely, the charge from the Lord of the Church to proclaim His Word in order to produce love, and therefore St. Paul centers everything in *ἀγάπη*, the love of understanding and purpose which knows and seeks to please Him in all things. This love was originally implanted by God into the human heart and is the true source and fountain of Christian life in thought, word, and deed. But it can exist only in "a clean heart." It was lost in the Fall, but is rekindled when the Holy Spirit by the Gospel creates faith in Jesus Christ, grants pardon, and renews the heart, Acts 15:9. Such a heart not only rejoices with the joy of forgiveness and salvation, but becomes active in the service of love toward God and the neighbor, Gal. 5:6; 2 Thess. 3:5. As a matter of fact, the expression *καθαρὰ καρδία* does not designate a perfect heart, since perfection is not attainable in this vale of temptation and sin. Daily renewal is necessary until we awake in His likeness, Ps. 17:15.

So it is also with regard to the *ἀγαθὴ συνείδησις*, good conscience, for a detailed study of which see CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, V, 676 and XIII, 337. Like a pure heart, so a good conscience is the source of intelligent and purposeful love, but there can be no good conscience except where the heart has experienced the thrill of divine forgiveness. The sinner cannot breathe easy until he has heard and believed God's gracious "Thy sins are forgiven thee." When that has occurred, there will also be the sincere desire to avoid sin and live unto righteousness and goodness, lest new guilt destroy the good conscience.

Thirdly, the Apostle mentions *πίστις ἀνυπόκριτος* as a source of love. How that comes about has already been stated. Feigned faith, hypocritical faith, accomplishes nothing. It cannot result in love nor produce a clean heart and a good conscience. It is only when there is actual trust in God's forgiving mercy that heart and conscience are cleaned and incited to pour out the thankoffering of love to the gracious God. Note the intimate connection and sequence of these three sources of love. "Faith comes first, is the foundation. Out of that comes a good conscience. Out of faith and a good conscience proceeds a clean and pure heart. Where these

three are found, there will also be true love." (L. Fuerbringer, Notes on 1 Tim.) — Thus it becomes clear that already at this early point the Apostle pleads for the pure proclamation of the Gospel which he so strongly emphasizes later; also that the possession and joy of salvation can only come through the Gospel of Christ Crucified accepted in sincere faith.

The Apostle goes on: ὧν τινες ἀστοχήσαντες ἐξετράπησαν εἰς ματαιολογίαν. The ὧν naturally refers to καρδιά, συνείδησις, and πίστις, concerning which the errorists had missed the mark, ἀστοχήσαντες; deviated (Thayer); failed (Goodspeed); swerved from (R. S. V.). It is used again 6:21 and 2 Tim. 2:18 and in both cases translated "erred," which may not seem so serious. But it goes deeper than that. The deviating was a deliberate turning away from the truth. Or shall we put it this way: By deliberately forsaking the truth they had lost their clean heart, good conscience, and unfeigned faith? "Each of these three phrases rebukes by contrast the mere ceremonial cleanness and the defiled conscience and the nominal Christianity of the Judaizers" (Pulp. Comm. ad loc.). Observe the close parallel in Titus 1:14-16.

This spiritual plight of the errorists manifested itself also in this, that they were led astray to vain talk, ἐξετράπησαν εἰς ματαιολογίαν. Their discussions, their preachments, were empty and fruitless, leading to no good result. Particularly did they prate about the Law, as the present modal participle θέλοντες indicates. They wanted to be Law teachers—which corroborates the suspicion that they were Judaizers, Titus 1:10—yet they had to be numbered among those to whom the Lord said: "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God," Matt. 22:29. See also Rom. 2:17-24. They did not understand, νοοῦντες, what they were saying nor what they were so emphatically affirming, διαβεβαιοῦνται. Their understanding of the Law was very shallow.—How often this situation has occurred and reoccurred also in our day. The history of American denominationalism shows that the origin of the many churches and sects can frequently be traced to faulty understanding of the Law with resultant legalistic practices or to deplorable mingling of Law and Gospel, usually under the pretext of taking God's Word very seriously. Specific cases in point are sabbatarianism, millennialism, anti-pedobaptism, and

pietism. Instances could be multiplied.—This section is primarily a lesson for Christian pastors and teachers, namely, so to study the Word that they teach it in truth and purity, with proper understanding. It also lends force to St. John's plea to Christians generally, 1 John 4:1. False doctrine is always dangerous, and we have no excuse if through ignorance of the Scriptures we are led astray.

But what about the Law? If it came from God, is it not good? Did not Jesus say: "This do, and thou shalt live?"—St. Paul continues: "Οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι καλὸς ὁ νόμος." Here νόμος must be taken in the narrow sense of Moral Law, the Decalogue. The δέ indicates that Paul wishes to answer an objection that was frequently voiced against him, namely, that he was anti-Moses and anti-Law, Acts 6:13-14; 21:28. He freely grants that the Law is excellent, καλός. How could it be otherwise? It is God's Law. Nothing evil can come from Him. The Law of Moses, received from God, is simply a reflection of God's holy will. "The Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good," Rom. 7:12. See also Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:24; 4:4-5. Yet if it should impart its excellence to men and achieve its divinely intended objectives, it must be used νομίμως, lawfully, properly, according to the intention of its Giver.

Wherein, then, does the proper use of the Law consist? We reply that it is used unlawfully, improperly, if it is used to obtain salvation. This fact is not altered by the statement of Jesus: "This do, and thou shalt live," Luke 10:28. Jesus was here speaking ideally, so as to lead the lawyer to recognize his imperfection. Thus St. Paul says Gal. 3:21: "If there had been a Law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the Law." He also says: "By the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight," Rom. 3:20. The Law was not intended by God to be a means of grace, "for by the Law is the knowledge of sin," *ibid.* The Law serves as a schoolmaster unto Christ; not directly, of course, since it contains nothing of Christ and forgiveness, but indirectly, by producing the knowledge of sin and thus impelling men to give ear to the Gospel of Jesus, even as a man's sickness impels him to seek the aid of a physician. Secondly, the Law is used improperly, if after the manner of the Ephesian errorists one considers it a source of deep and hidden knowledge,

or uses it as subject of fantastic speculation. God intended it as a means of making sin appear as sin, Rom. 7:13.

This use of the Law the Apostle describes vv. 9-11. The Law, he says, is not made, has not been laid down, *κεῖται*, pass. perf. of *τίθημι*, for a righteous man, but for sinners. *Δίκαιος*, strictly considered, designates an upright man who complies with, lives perfectly according to, God's *δική*, righteousness; not merely *ἀκροατὰ νόμου*, but *ποιητὰ νόμου*, Rom. 2:12-14. There are no people like that on earth, never have been since the Fall, except Christ; hence there were none when God repeated His Law on Sinai. But there are *δίκαιοι* nevertheless, sinners who have been justified by faith in Jesus Christ and have thus become righteous before God. For such the Law was not given nor intended. He who is justified by faith does God's will and Law voluntarily, without coercion from without. He already abhors sin and crime. Paul here views the Law not as a perfect rule for a holy life—which it is also for the regenerate—but as a system of threats and penalties which the justified children of God do not need. The love of God was shed abroad in their hearts and impels them to strive after complete mastery of their flesh and to do the will of God in all things, Rom. 5:5; 1 John 4:19. The Law has lost its claim upon them, Rom. 6:14; 8:2; Gal. 2:19; 3:25; 5:18, though sincere children of God will ever be willing to admit their numberless shortcomings, Rom. 7:18-20.

The real purpose of the Law, then, as far as sinful mankind is concerned, is to show that sins are crimes committed against God. Hence Paul now proceeds to give a catalog of lawbreakers, against whom the Law is aimed, yet which is not complete or exhaustive. First he mentions the *ἄνομοι καὶ ἀνυπότακτοι*, lawless and insubordinate, who do what the Law forbids and leave undone what the Law demands. Furthermore there are the *ἀσεβεῖς*, those devoid of reverence and respect for God and holy things; the *ἁμαρτωλοὶ*, who delight and indulge freely in the service of sin; the *ἀνόσιοι*, who are impious and wicked; the *βέβηλοι* (from *βαίνω*, to step: denoting a place not forbidden to pedestrians), who are unconsecrated, profane, ungodly people, Matt. 12:5; Acts 24:6. Then there are the *πατρολῶαι* and *μητρολῶαι* (from *ἀλοάω*, to thresh or smite), who may be actual patricides or matricides or merely such as

strike their parents, Ex. 21:15. The list further includes ἀνδρόφονοι, murderers; πόρνοι, fornicators; ἀρσενοκοῖται (from ἄρσεν, male, and κοιτή, bed), homosexuals, Rom. 1:27; 1 Cor. 6:9; ἀνδραποδίσται, people who sell prisoners into slavery, hence manstealers, kidnapers; ψεύσται, liars; ἐπίορκοι, perjurers, Lev. 19:11-12; Matt. 5:33. Διδασκαλία is not the act of teaching, but a summary of teachings, τύπος διδαχῆς, Rom. 6:17. The term ὑγιαίνουσα really means healthy and is frequently used by St. Paul to describe purity of doctrine, as opposed to the ἑτεροδιδασκαλεῖν in v. 3 and as demanded in such passages as John 8:31-32; Rom. 16:17; 2 Tim. 3:14; Titus 3:10, and others.

Of course, this view of the Law does not make St. Paul nor the Christian of today antinomian. Paul does not regard the Law as an end in itself, but as the means to an end. Its divinely intended purpose is to block the designs of the old Adam, to arouse the consciousness of guilt, then also, after conversion, to show forth the Christian life. The Law has but a subsidiary purpose or place in God's gracious economy, before and after conversion, to prepare the soil of the heart for the seed of the Gospel, or else to serve as guide according to which to cleanse one's way. It is not a means of grace, but a handmaid of the Gospel, which saves.

The Apostle closes this section: v. 11. The phrase κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον refers to the Gospel ministry as he had practiced it these thirty years. He had preached these truths everywhere and in the same manner. Here μακάριος does not mean happy, but blessed. This and 6:15 are the only places where it is used of God; ordinarily God is called εὐλογητός, Mark 14:61; 2 Cor. 11:31. The phrase εὐαγγέλιον τῆς δόξης τοῦ μακαρίου θεοῦ might mean one of three things: (1) It might be a periphrasis for God Himself, as in Rom. 6:4 or Ex. 24:16-17; or (2) it might refer to Jesus Christ, who is "the Brightness of God's glory," Heb. 1:3; or (3) it might be the Gospel which tells of God's glory, His grace or holiness, Eph. 1:6, 12 (Pulp. Comm. ad loc.). This Gospel was given to him as a trust, ὃ ἐπιστεύθη, when Jesus on the Damascus road called him as a chosen vessel to carry His name before Gentiles and kings and the Children of Israel, Acts 9:15; Rom. 1:1, 5; 2:16; Gal. 1:11-12; Eph. 3:1-8. At the time of this writing he was still true to that trust, a splendid example in view of the innumerable hardships.

which he gladly endured in proclaiming the glad news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

There appear to be two main emphases in the paragraph which we have briefly considered. The one is that Timothy, as a trustee of the truth and a shepherd of souls, should champion purity of doctrine and set himself steadfastly against any type of heresy or pointless, unfruitful vagaries of men in the Christian Church and pulpit. That applies today with equal force to all Christian pastors. Secondly, the proper evaluation of the place of the Law in God's economy, so as to guard against antinomianism on the one hand and legalism, work righteousness, or mingling of Law and Gospel, on the other. For a fuller understanding of point two the reader should not fail to review the splendid discussion of the third use of the Law in the Formula of Concord, *Triglotta*, p. 693 f.