

1 TIMOTHY 1:5

THE AIM OF OUR CHARGE

“The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”¹

Paul charged Timothy to remain in Ephesus, indicating that the young man was considering moving from that location. Specifically, the young preacher was charged to remain in that port city so that he might confront a particular group of false teachers who were presenting false doctrine. The anticipated confrontation was not to consist entirely of negative statements; Timothy was to provide, as it were, the antidote of “sound doctrine.” The membership of the congregation was to be inoculated against succumbing to error through “sound doctrine.” Sound doctrine, literally healthy doctrine, will serve to guard against error.

One serious fallacy of contemporary church life is the effort to “dialogue” with error. Whenever false teachers spread their novel teaching, it has become de rigueur to endeavour to understand them—to understand why they feel the need to disseminate error and to understand what they are saying. Students of the cults expend considerable energies trying to understand the motivation for the cultists’ execrable work—energies that would be far better spent in studying the Faith. Consequently, elders who attempt to answer every false teacher will shortly discover they are incapable of keeping abreast of the plethora of strange new doctrines that seemingly multiply out of thin air. I must wonder whether Timothy had grown frustrated with attempts to reason with those promoting gross error. Nothing can be more discouraging, depressing, disheartening than attempting to reason with those who promote errant doctrine. Often, they have become so invested in the error that any attempt at change threatens them at a visceral level.

Paul’s charge was couched in strong terms precisely because the consequence of leaving the church to the devices of those promoting error was too great for the Apostle to contemplate. Thus, Timothy’s presence with the faithful in Ephesus was far more vital than the younger preacher could imagine. Should he leave, the congregation would be defenceless against the erroneous teaching that even then threatened the church. To permit the teaching to continue unchecked would assure that the church would shortly disappear from that community.

Before continuing into our study, I need to speak rather pointedly to problems resident among the churches of our Lord—problems bearing on the message. Whenever those holding to errant doctrine are threatened, they respond with choler, attacking the character of the righteous. When those so attacking the godly are themselves in positions of trust and authority within the congregation, the godly have but two choices—they may either submit to error, accepting the promotion of falsehoods as somehow honourable; or they may act with courage to quit the errant.

On other occasions, I have cited Charles Spurgeon as advising precisely the latter course. The great man has written of his withdrawal from the Baptist Union, “As soon as I saw, or thought I saw, that error had become firmly established, I did not deliberate, but quitted the body at once. Since then my one counsel has been, ‘Come ye out from among them.’ If I have rejoiced in the loyalty to Christ’s truth which has been shown in other courses of action, yet I have felt that no protest could be equal to that of distinct separation from known evil.”²

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² Charles Spurgeon, “Attempts at the Impossible,” From the December 1888 issue of *The Sword and Trowel*, <http://www.reformedreader.org/spurgeon/dgc23.htm>, accessed 15 February 2013

The situation confronting Timothy, however, is that of an elder facing errant teachers. When challenged by such situations, the minister of Christ is compelled to take a stand. For the sake of Him who appoints to holy service and for the sake of His holy flock, the man of God must point out the error, standing firm until it is evident that the people of God refuse to follow. That is a different situation requiring a different response. However, when the false teachers are first infiltrating, then the man of God must stand firm in opposition to them.

Standing firm is not to be done with choler or malice in the heart of the elder. He must be motivated by love—love for the Master, love for the message of life, love for the people of God. The object of the elder's love will be evident by the manner in which he responds to error.

THE FALSE TEACHERS' DOCTRINE AND LIVES — Several verses vital to our understanding of what it means to be righteous or to be unrighteous are found in the first letter from the Apostle of Love. One such verse worthy of serious contemplation reads. "If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him" [1 JOHN 2:29]. Underscore that final clause in your mind: "You may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him."

Soon after, John continues this theme of a righteous life revealing righteousness in the heart when he writes, "Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother" [1 JOHN 3:4-10].

Consider one final passage that is found in this first letter from John's pen. "This is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers" [1 JOHN 3:11-16].

There is a relationship between the guiding principles for an individual's life and the manner in which she lives. What one believes influences the way in which the individual lives. Beliefs matter; if I fill my mind with thoughts of rebellion and rage, I will likely be an angry person who can never be content with what I have or with who I am. If I feed my mind on pornography, I will disrespect others and set myself at the centre of life. If I expend my energies on acquiring things, I will value possessions more than relationships.

Jesus warned of precisely such danger when He said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness” [MATTHEW 6:19-23]!

In this context, it is beneficial to remember something Jesus said as recorded by Mark. “[Jesus] said, ‘What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person’” [MARK 7:20-23].

The false teachers whom Timothy would need to confront were motivated by their own desires. They appear to have sought adulation from people rather than commendation from God. They were greedy for gain rather than seeking to honour the Master. Let’s look at some specifics statements that expose those who were even then threatening the Ephesian congregation. These false teachers wanted the praise of men rather than the praise of God. Paul says they had a consuming desire “to be teachers of the law,” though they had no understanding either of what they were saying or concerning their confident assertions [1 TIMOTHY 1:7]. Their ambition exceeded their ability and their knowledge. They were incapable of answering questions concerning morality and ethics since they were above their pay grade.

These ecclesiastical parasites fit the damning description Jesus gave of such individuals. “They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others” [MATTHEW 23:5-7].

They endeavoured to make people feel good about themselves, rather than declaring the whole counsel of God. They were unwilling to call sinners to repentance, ignoring the truth that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” [1 TIMOTHY 1:15]. They preferred allowing sinners to perish in their sin rather than expose the sinful condition in which they were trapped.

They chose not to pursue holiness, choosing rather to be religious [cf. 1 TIMOTHY 4:6 ff.]. Controversy and quarrels about inconsequential matters marked their service [1 TIMOTHY 6:3 ff.]. These false teachers were masters of minutiae, ministers of the mundane. Motivated by a desire for financial gain, they were concerned about the pay scale rather than opportunities for service [see 1 TIMOTHY 6:6-10]. They shrank from the hard tasks associated with serving as ministers of the Gospel, seeking an easy life [see 1 TIMOTHY 6:11-16]. They were expert at avoiding contact with broken, hurting people, even while being noted as pompous and ostentatious in the pulpit.

Writing at perhaps the same time Paul was writing this letter to Timothy, Peter warned of false teachers such as those Timothy was required to confront. “False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep” [2 PETER 2:1-3].

Earlier in his ministry, Paul confronted similar errant teaching among the churches of Galatia. At that time, he wrote, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” [GALATIANS 1:6-9].

Later in this same letter, the Apostle speaks quite sharply concerning these false teachers. “I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves” [GALATIANS 5:12]!

I understand that some of the faithful may be uneasy whenever the Apostles speak sharply, pointedly, harshly as they warn against heretics. In a similar manner, the saints frequently express discomfort should the pastor pointedly warn of the dangers of heresy and should he openly name errors, which of necessity exposes those promoting such heresy. However, you must recognise the danger to the flock and the danger to the eternal welfare of the lost if error is not confronted quickly and if false doctrine is not exposed pointedly. If the writings of the Apostles seem harsh to us, it is probably because their concern for the glory of the Son of God and for the good of human souls is greater than ours, and because the tolerance on which we pride ourselves is indifference to the truth!

Paul reminds those who name the Name of Christ Jesus of their condition when the Master called them. “You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” [EPHESIANS 2:1-3]. There was a day when you and I were dead. Now, in Christ, we have been made alive.

I do not like to read the opening verses of this chapter without reading the verses that follow. “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” [EPHESIANS 2:4-10].

As redeemed people, we are saved for a purpose. The contrast between what we were and what we are is striking. The false teachers either do not draw such distinct lines, or they draw new lines that obviate the will of God! What I mean is that the tendency of the errant teachers is either to ignore practical holiness or to create false standards of holiness. Consequently, there are preachers who teach that a beard is a sign of rebellion. Others get lathered up about women wearing “that which pertaineth unto a man”; they can become quite creative about what women can and cannot wear. Others want to define what type of music is acceptable, what foods can or cannot be eaten, the length of hair—what we need to see is that if God has not spoken on an issue, we have freedom. However, when God has spoken, as in the case of morality and ethics, we are obligated to heed His Word and do what He commands.

Because the people of God have been redeemed, they must be taught to live according to grace. Therefore, the Word commands believers, “Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Then, we who are called Christ’s Name are warned against living as we once did. God’s Word warns, “Sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” [EPHESIANS 5:1-5].

The speech identified with this dying world should not characterise the people of God. The morality of this fallen world should not be expressed in the conduct of the people of God. To permit yourself, as a follower of Christ, to live as the world lives is to dishonour the holy Name by which you are called. It confuses the dying denizens of the world since they are unable to reconcile your words and your actions. Therefore, the Apostle urges believers in the Son of God, “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ” [**PHILIPPIANS 3:17, 18**].

Paul also says “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” [**COLOSSIANS 3:5-10**].

Thus, it seems fair to say that the false teachers teach what is false and they embrace lifestyles that dishonour the Name of Christ. Because they cannot be holy and righteous through their own efforts, they go about creating a new morality that satisfies their novel demands. Then, they impose this novel, errant lifestyle on the people of God. Thus, they appear to be pious because they created their own standard and they are able to live up to that new standard. However, whenever those following them read the Word of God, they will be dismayed to discover that there is no parity between what is taught and what God expects.

Whilst there may be various areas in which one may teach error, the child of God need only know Christ. John writes, “Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works” [**2 JOHN 9-11**].

The Christian is to be alert to anything that deviates from the teaching about Christ. I have often said that the teaching about Christ is defined by the fact that Jesus is very God and very man. He was born of a virgin, gave His life as a sacrifice because of our helpless and sinful condition and He was buried. He broke the bonds of death, rising from the dead on the third day. He ascended into the heavens where He is now seated at the right hand of the Father, from whence He is coming again to receive those whom He has redeemed. It is through faith in Him—the Risen, Reigning Son of God—that our sins are forgiven and we are given the gift of life. The authority for this truth is the Bible, which is to be received as the Word of God.

Whenever anyone denies any of these truths, that person is a heretic; we are not even to greet such a person. Should an individual attempt to transfer trust to himself or herself rather than pointing to the Son of God, you must leave immediately. Should someone attempt to tell you that they have a new authority for what they are teaching—whether a book that was hidden for a long time or whether they point to some individual as having divine insight into the mind of God—know that such a person is a false teacher. Should an individual try to teach you that you can do some act to merit God’s grace, know that the individual is a heretic. Should anyone attempt to tell you that salvation will leave you as you have always been, you must know that that individual is a liar. Should someone teach that Jesus did not actually die on the cross, that He did not actually and literally rise from the dead or that He did not physically ascend into heaven itself, know that the individual is teaching heresy. Know that when someone denies that Jesus shall come to receive us to Himself, that person is a false teacher.

THE ADVANTAGE OF ORTHODOX DOCTRINE — I have spent quite enough time speaking of the false teachers. Suffice it to know that they must give an answer to God for the errant teaching they have disseminated and for the people they have tripped up. Nevertheless, let the people of God beware of falling into the trap of going after such strange teachers.

In the text for this day, the Apostle is contrasting the purpose of his instruction with that of the false teachers. Paul's goal is to produce in the congregation the characteristics that God expects—love toward Him and love toward those that belong to Him. The Master Himself stated that the first and greatest commandment is that believers are to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" [LUKE 10:27]. The second greatest commandment is like the first because it flows out of and is dependent upon the first: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" [MATTHEW 22: 39]. Love for God is to be supreme; and when we have known the love of God, such love will rise spontaneously.

I understand very well that the world ridicules preaching about love, distorting such teaching as a caricature of the Faith. However, it is impossible to escape the truth that love is the mark of a Christian. Jesus said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" [JOHN 13:35]. If you have shared in our Sunday evening studies, you will have heard the stress on love as Jason has led us through the Letters of the Apostle of Love.

John has written, "By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" [1 JOHN 2:3-6].

Those who claim to love God must love God's people. So, John has written, yet again, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth" [1 JOHN 3:16-18].

The concept is made exceptionally clear when John writes, "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us" [1 JOHN 4:8-12].

If we who preach the Word fail to insist that Christians are to reveal the love of God through their conduct, we do a disservice to the people of God and we dishonour the Saviour. However, that concept of love favoured by those of this dying world is foreign to the teaching of the Word of God. This world, and consequently, the caricature of preachers presented by the world, thinks of love in an emotional context. However, love, as offered by God and as reflected in the lives of His people, is the love of choice; the love of God is love that arises out of the will. This love is built from self-denial and self-sacrifice in order to benefit others.

To illustrate this truth, listen to a portion from John's Second Letter. "I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it" [2 JOHN 5, 6].

Faith and love are signs of the New Birth; they are also commands. It is when faith is regarded as an intuition and love as an emotion that they appear to lie beyond the sphere of duty. However, Christian faith is an obedient response to God's self-revelation in Christ. Likewise, Christian love belongs to the sphere of action rather than emotion. Love is not an involuntary, uncontrollable passion; rather, it is unselfish service undertaken by the believer's choice.

Writing the Galatian Christians, Paul makes an insightful statement. "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love" [GALATIANS 5:6]. Personal trust in Jesus the Messiah gives us a right standing with the Father on the basis of Christ's life and death for us. Simultaneously, faith informs the conscience—the inborn moral mechanism that registers verdicts on our conduct according to the law of God that is written on our hearts. Because we are transformed in this manner, having received the love of God, we want to obey God. Those who are not born from above cannot will such love since they have no capacity to love. They do not know God; and therefore, they have never known the love of God. Thus, they are incapable of willing love.

The point is vitally important! Those who are born from above are transformed into people who want to obey the Saviour. Recall the affirmation John made and which we read mere moments ago. "This is love, that we walk according to his commandments" [2 JOHN 6]. It is impossible to be saved and choose to obey at some later point. Jesus is Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all. The child of God is not now perfected, but he is being perfected and consequently he endeavours to pursue righteousness, seeking to know the will of God and to do that will.

According to the text, this godly love finds its origin in three sources in the life of the believer—a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith. This, then, is the anatomy of love in Christian experience. "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" [1 TIMOTHY 1:5]. Let's think through what these sources mean to the believer.

Love flows out of "a pure heart." Of necessity, this requirement excludes outsiders, since they cannot have a pure heart before God. However, from earliest days, the Word of God stresses the need for believers to have a pure heart. Here are a few instances of the requirement for a pure heart as detailed in the Psalms. David asks,

"Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?"

He immediately provides the answer in the next verse.

"He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully."

[PSALM 24:3, 4]

Asaph, in the 73rd Psalm, opens with a confession that should encourage each believer.

"Truly God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart."

[PSALM 73:1]

When he had sinned so grievously, David prayed:

“Create for me a pure heart, O God!
Renew a resolute spirit within me!”

[PSALM 51:10 NET BIBLE]

The second source of godly love is “a good conscience.” When Paul speaks of a conscience that is good, he uses a term that speaks of that which is perfect, that which produces pleasure and a sense of well-being. Paul endeavoured to have a clear conscience—a conscience that was free of offence against either God or man [see ACTS 24:16]. A moment ago, I defined conscience as “the inborn moral mechanism that registers verdicts on our conduct according to the law of God that is written on our hearts.” It is true that only the redeemed have possibility of a good conscience. Paul writes, “To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled” [TITUS 1:15].

Despite this, even the outsider can know what is right and what is wrong. In another place, Paul has written, “When Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them” [ROMANS 2:14, 15].

Finally, godly love finds its origin in “a sincere faith.” When the Word of God speaks of sincere faith, it speaks of faith without pretence. This is trust in the Christ without any thought of reliance on one’s own effort. This is the type of faith exhibited by Timothy and which Paul commended. “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well” [2 TIMOTHY 1:5].

The aim of every godly pastor is to produce a church marked by love—love that springs spontaneously out of lives characterised by “a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” False teachers cannot produce such love, only a saccharine, sickly imitation. False teachers have dirty hearts, not pure hearts. They have guilty consciences that condemn them whenever they permit themselves to think about God and His glory. They have hypocritical faith—faith that is focused on what it can obtain for themselves rather than focused on pleasing the True and Living God. The life of false teachers can never produce love for God.

I am not trying to be mean spirited, but much of what passes as church life in this modern world is tainted by the wickedness of fallen people. If the elder fails to exalt Christ the Lord, if the elder neglects to reveal the love of God in Christ, the people may never be able to produce godly love. If the congregation is not confronted whenever it begins to stray into novel paths, the people will be unable to love as an act of the will. They will mouth the words, but because they can only seek a feeling, they will be engaged in an endless pursuit of that which is ephemeral and unattainable.

THE ADVANTAGE OF ORTHOPRAXY — Orthodoxy is necessary for orthopraxy, though orthopraxy of necessity flows only from orthodoxy. These are two important terms; orthodoxy refers to right doctrine, orthopraxy speaks of right practise. An individual can attempt to live right, but if life is not founded on right doctrine, the effort will exhaust the individual, creating frustration and disappointment for her. Orthodoxy, right doctrine, however, will ensure that the individual receives strength to walk according to the will of God. Two passages in particular from the Letters of the Apostle Paul emphasise this truth; they should be marked in your Bible.

The first passage is found in one of the Prison Letters written to the Church in Colossae. The Apostle writes, “As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” [COLOSSIANS 2:6, 7]. A godly walk grows out of sound teaching.

The next verse is found in one of the Apostle’s earliest letters, the Letter to the churches of Galatia. Paul writes, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” [GALATIANS 5:16]. Again, the lifestyle enjoined grows out of an attitude that seeks to know the mind of Christ and makes every effort to do those things that please Him. Of course, we know we are walking by the Spirit when the fruit of the Spirit is evident in life. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Then, the Apostle concludes this vital teaching with this admonition, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit” [GALATIANS 5:22-25].

The teaching provided in Galatians was iterated when Paul wrote the saints in Colossae. In the letter to the Colossian Christians, Paul wrote, “From the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” [COLOSSIANS 1:9, 10]. Filled with knowledge of Christ’s will and immersed in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, the believer lives according to the will of God, pleasing Him and bearing fruit even as he continually grows in knowledge of God. Think about that! Learning about God impels a closer walk with God; and, the closer we walk with Him, the more we know of Him.

Paul would appeal to the example of the missionary team when he wrote his first letter to the believers in Thessalonica. “You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory” [1 THESSALONIANS 2:10-12]. The Thessalonian Christians had witnessed the holy life that is pleasing to God through watching the lives of the missionaries. Therefore, when the missionaries charged them to walk in a manner worthy of God, they had both the precept and the example to emulate.

Consider one further portion of the Word that presents this teaching of the necessity of living a godly life. “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” [EPHESIANS 4:1-3].

Orthopraxy, right living, becomes the assurance of God’s effective work in one’s life. Do not imagine that I advocate attempting to merely trying to live right—you cannot live right if you fail to hold to correct doctrine. Besides, merely acting right can never make one a Christian. However, you must know that whenever one refuses to live according to the will of God, it is de facto evidence that that person has not known the Saviour. Those who love God, seek to honour Him as God. Those who are enamoured of themselves, though they know about God, refuse to honour Him as God or give thanks to Him. Thus, they grow futile in their thinking and according to the Word of God, their foolish hearts become darkened [see ROMANS 1:21, 22]. Shortly, such people are revealed to be fools—people devoid of moral perspicuity and ethically deviant. All the while, they congratulate themselves on their piety. Get your doctrine straight, and your lifestyle will be straight as well. The obverse is not true, however.

I close on this note. I have mentioned how we meet on Sunday evenings as Brother Jason directs us in a survey leading participants through the Bible. We just completed 1 John. We discovered that the letter was written to encourage those who are believers in the Son of God. Studying John's First Letter, we learned these truths about Christians:

- the Christian does what is right;
- the Christian endeavours to walk in the light with Christ;
- the Christian loves the brotherhood of believers;
- the Christian is sensitive to the presence of sin;
- the Christian no longer enjoys sinning;
- the Christian is alert to the spirit of antichrist;
- the Christian is enabled to overcome the world;
- the Christian loves the Father and the Son.

And that is the aim of our charge! We seek love as the hallmark of Christian life!

Are you a Christian? Is the evidence apparent in your lifestyle? Are you growing in the love of Christ the Lord? Is your life marked by a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith? If so, your life is characterised by the love of God—a love willed toward others. Having said this, if you did not start right, there is no hope that you will live a life of love. Christ's love marks those who belong to Him. Self-love marks those who have never known Him. To have the love of Christ, you must receive Him as Master over your life.

This is the Word of God, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is my Master,' believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free. With the heart one believes and is made right with the Father, and with the mouth one agrees with God and is set free." That passage concludes, as you well know, with this citation from the Prophet, "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Master will be set free" [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].³

The one thus saved will be free from fear, free from guilt, free from condemnation. She will have passed from death into life, being born from above. Do you have this life? My prayer is that you are born from above through faith in the Son of God. If you are thus twice-born, love will mark your life. Amen.

³ Free translation by the author