

The Perfect Law Of Liberty

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“...the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this; not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it...he will be blessed in what he does.” (James 1:25 NIV)

In these profound lines we find the duty of all Christians, without which no one can be blessed. God’s blessing is predicated on the assumption that we address this “perfect law” in four ways.

- “look intently into it”
- “continue to do this”
- “not forgetting what we hear”
- “but doing this”

Apparently, James attached a great deal of importance to this “law”. First he called it “perfect”. Second if we read it and ignore it (not do what it says), we are shortsighted, cannot remember what is important, and become as one who cannot remember his resemblance after looking in the mirror.

In light of the importance placed on this “law”, it is imperative that we determine exactly what constitutes a law in the scriptures. What do we look for when we search for authority and precedent in the scriptures?

Thou Shalt? Thou Shalt Not?

If one searches for commands of this type in the New Testament, it becomes quickly apparent that there is a scarcity of them. Does this mean that we have almost no absolute commands in the New Testament? Not at all!

There are many ways used by the Holy Spirit to convey God’s will to man other than by a harsh “thou shalt” or “thou shalt not”.

I like to compare this to the way we drive oxen in the yoke. One must deal harshly with cattle for they are not bright. We prod them with a goad, use a whip, etc. This is like the direct command. Do we need this? Indeed sometimes we do!

On the other hand, this is not the way our Father guides us most of the time. What follows is a look at several means by which we are guided by God’s word.

“Charge”

When we are “charged” by Jesus or His apostles to some task, we are no less obligated to obey than when we read “thou shalt”, etc.

Paul states, *“Of these things put them in remembrance, CHARGING them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers.”*

Of the word “charging”, Strong defines it as “diamarturomai” [1263] “to attest or protest earnestly, or [by impl.] hortatively (preaching-JDL):—charge, testify (unto), witness”.

Paul directs Timothy, *“I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.”* (1 Tim. 5:21).

It is worthy of note that Paul had not used a solitary “thou shalt not”, etc. in his entire first epistle to Timothy, yet charged his to keep it without partiality.

Paul charged Timothy. *“This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare;”*.

The word used in this verse is “paraggello” [3853-Strong] “to transmit a message, i.e. [by impl] to enjoin;—[give in] charge, [give] command, declare.”

Several uses of this “command” word are as follows in brief:

- 1 Tim. 1:3 *“...that thou mightest CHARGE some that they teach no other doctrine...”*
- 1 Tim. 5:7 *“...these things give in charge, that they may be...”*
- 1 Tim. 6:13 *“I charge thee in the sight of God, ...keep this command...”*
- 1 Tim 6:17 *“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they...”*

But, more than this, the same word is rendered “command” in the following, and I will merely list them. The reader is advised to read them in their completeness to note the imperatives in them.

- Acts 16:18
- 1 Cor. 7:10
- 2 Thess. 3:4-6
- 1 Tim. 4:6

- Acts 10:42
- 1 Thess. 4:11
- 2 Thess. 3:10

We must recognize all the charges given by Jesus and the apostles as commands and put them in that “perfect law”.

“Testimony”

Many references to “testimony” both of Jesus and the apostles are to be found in the New Testament. The word from which we derive this word is “maturion”, Strong [3142] and is defined as “something evidential, i.e. (gen) evidence given or (spec) the Decalogue (in the sacred tabernacle): to be testified, testimony, witness.”

Paul told the Corinthian church, *“That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you.”* (1 Cor. 1:5-6).

Further, we find Paul speaking in 1 Cor. 2:1, *“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.”*

And in 2 Thess. 1:10, Paul says, *“...our (apostle’s) testimony among you was believed...”*

Also, in 2 Tim. 1:8, *“Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner...”*

By these, we are persuaded that the “testimonies” of Christ and the Apostles are also part of that “perfect law”.

“Traditions”

Some may object to the use of traditions in a study of the “perfect law”. However, we should not dismiss this study out of hand for there is ample precedent for placing certain traditions in this “perfect law”.

Paul teaches us in 2 Thess. 3:6, *“...withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.”*

Also in 2 Thess. 2:15, *“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”*

The word for tradition in these passages is “paradosis” Strong [5862], “transmission, a precept: ordinance, tradition.”

With reference to the definition “ordinance” above, please note 1 Cor. 11:2, *“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”*

From this we see that the “traditions” of the apostles were, in fact, ordinances and must of necessity be included in that “perfect law”.

“Examples”

One cannot study the “perfect law” without considering the use of examples revealed to us in the scriptures. There are examples of Jesus, the apostles, and holy men and women of old. Also, there are examples of the early church that must not be ignored. There are sinful deeds held forth as negative examples that we should not follow. To note a few:

- John 13:15, *“For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.”*
- James 5:10, *“Take... the prophets, ...for an example...”*
- Heb. 4:11, *“...lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”*

I have given these concisely for lack of space. I would urge all to read these in their completeness.

“Examples” is taken from the word “hupodeigma” which means “and exhibit for imitation or warning (fig. specimen, adumbration) en- (ex) - ample, pattern.”

Peter points out the ultimate example: Jesus. *“...because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:”* (1 Pet. 2:21)

Another word that is used for “example” is “Tupos” [5179] Strong. It is defined as, among other meanings, “A die, as struck, a shape, type, i.e., (fig) a model (for imitation) or (for warning): en-(ex)-ample, fashion, figure, form, manner, pattern...”

The following are examples of this usage.

Example (s)

- 1 Tim. 4:12, *“...be thou an example of the believers...”*
- 1 Cor. 10:6, *“...these things were our examples...”*

Ensamble (s)

- Phil. 3:17, “...as ye have us for an ensample...”
- 2 Thess. 3:9, “...ourselves an ensample unto you...”

Fashion

- Acts 7:44, “...according to the fashion...”

Figure

- Rom. 5:14, “...the figure of him that was to come.”

Form

- Rom. 6:17, “...that form of doctrine...”

Pattern

- Titus 2:7, “...a pattern of good works...”
- Heb. 8:5, “...according to the pattern shewed to...”
- 1 Tim. 1:16, “...for a pattern to them which...”

From these passages we can see the necessity of the examples found in the New Testament. There are examples of the early church, without which we would have no knowledge of congregational worship. There are examples of personal conduct, both positive and negative for our admonition, while we are admonished to make ourselves examples of the believers.

In light of these, how can anyone doubt the inclusion of scriptural examples in the “perfect law”?

“Witness (es)”

In all facets of the human experience, one fact remains constant. To establish truth one must have a witness or witnesses to the fact.

Under Moses’ law, fact was established under two or more witnesses (Heb. 10:28).

Paul teaches us not to receive an accusation on the basis of less than two witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19).

However, it is not necessary to have multiple witnesses to establish truth from a New Testament standpoint. Jesus taught, “...man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (Matt. 4:4).

It seems that Jesus considered once said is enough: no need to search further (although corroborating utterances add force to the truth).

Jesus told Nicodemus, "...We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness." (John 3:11).

Many passages in the New Testament attest to the witness of Jesus to the gospel of the kingdom. (see John 5th chapter).

Jesus said to his apostles. "And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning." (John 15:27). The apostles are reliable witnesses to the truth.

At his conversion, Ananias told Paul, "For thou shalt be his (Jesus') witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard." (Acts 22:15). Paul elaborates on this in Acts 26:16, "...to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;".

It is obvious that Jesus continued to guide Paul through inspiration, and it is further obvious that Paul continued to function as guided in all that he taught and practiced.

When we observe the teachings and the practices of the apostles in the early church, we realize it is for our guidance. These witnesses are an integral part of that "perfect law".

"Words Of The Apostles"

Paul teaches. "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you." (Phil. 4:9).

This is all encompassing. To analyze this, consider:

- Things learned from Paul.
- Things received (from Paul through others)
- Heard of Paul (conversation)
- Seen in me. (His manner of life and conduct in the church.)

In these four ways Paul taught all around him, and of these four he commanded "DO".

Read in the Acts of the apostles of the life of Paul after his conversion as he goes among his kinsmen, the Jews. Follow him as he goes among the pagans, teaching the gospel. See him as he labors, establishes congregations as he goes, then returns to see their progress. In all these things, he commanded, "DO".

It is no wonder, then, in the light of these facts that Paul would write. "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample." (Phil. 3:17).

Also 2 Thess. 3:9, “... *but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.*”

In 1 Cor. 14:37, “*If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.*”

And 2 Pet. 1:3, “*According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness...*”

We are compelled to place all the words of the apostles in that “perfect law”.

These, then, are the actual components of that “perfect law”.

- Direct commands of Christ and His apostles
- Charges given by the same
- Testimony of Jesus and the apostles
- Traditions of the apostles
- Examples of the apostles and the early church
- The witness of divinely inspired men
- Words and acts of the apostles

In love of the truth,

J D Logan

