2 Timothy - Commentaries by Frederick George Patterson

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Paul’s gospel and Paul’s doctrine are positive things for the last days. We are walking and laboring in the midst of an immense network of systems in which Paul’s ministry is totally unknown. For it he suffered as an evildoer unto bonds.

How like to Christ’s own words are those of the Apostle in v. 10!

We now get corruption of doctrine (v. 2:16, &c). There had been falling away. Thus (v. 19) individual responsibility (coupled with God’s faithful knowledge of His own) to depart from iniquity. In v. 20 we have ecclesiastical apprehension.

Supposing a person says, “I do not see that so and so is wrong when Scripture forbids it,” this those walking in the truth cannot allow. You cannot take the conscience of the individual for the rule of the church. Scripture is its guide. Thus we have to walk with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. At the first we do not find this expression. It was more general, “all that call upon Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.” Now it was “all that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart.” The Church should have been the witness for the glory of Christ on high, and is now mixed up with all that witnesses against Him here below.

Calling upon the name of the Lord is in itself only profession; of course, if true, it is salvation too.

In v. 24, “patient” should be “bearing evil.” “In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves,” &c., that they might be recovered to God’s will from the snares of the devil.

Paul's Doctrine and Other Papers, Last Days, The

"As Jannes and Jambres, withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth." (2 Tim. 3:8.)

The last words of any servant of God, must carry with them a feeling of deep solemnity; and especially so, when we think of them as written or spoken at the close of their earthly service, the fruit of their varied and lengthened experience, and with the solemn judgment of all, which intercourse with God for years had given. With how much greater power must they come to us, as the words of inspiration given by the Spirit of God, as these last words of Paul to Timothy-his own son in the faith.

The Scriptures of God speaking generally, contain Truth revealed for Eternity: they also contain Truth for Time, which will have no application when Time has passed away; yet the issues of what they teach-though not for Time, will have their bearing on the eternal history of all, to whom addressed, or to whom they were spoken. Such is Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy. Such the last words of this man of God. Eternal in the issues unfolded, they were written for time, and have their special application now, before time has passed away.

How solemn too is the thought that in every case when the last words of the great leaders of God's people have been heard in Scripture, we invariably find the total decay and absolute ruin of all that surrounded them: that which the heart labored for and loved, had fallen-never to rise again; and while a pathway for faith is sure to be found; marked out of God in the midst of it, there never is a hope of recovery. The eye is turned to the Lord-dissatisfied with things here, and it looks for His intervention-His return, as the only joy and resource, and hope left.

See the close of Moses' career, and read the touching narrative at the end of his path-closing with his prophetic song; and learn somewhat of the heart and feelings of this man of God, before he passed away to be no more seen. (Deut. 31;32)

So also David's last words, and his songs when the wreck of hopes lay strewed around him, his heart turns to that morning without clouds-to that Just Ruler over men, whom he saw by the Spirit; the ideal Christ of God, as far as could then be known.

What too must have been the feelings of Paul, in the midst of the corruption of that which was best-the best thing ever seen on earth next to the only Perfect One. Would that one's heart, by God's Spirit taught, might approach these last words of Paul (2 Timothy), with somewhat of those feelings that filled his soul, as he wrote to his beloved son in the faith: the one of whom he could say "I have no man likeminded," with him. When we look around at the carnal, worldly ones, whom we meet day after day in His church; carnal and worldly though His: we little wonder at his anguish of soul, and the growing and deepening preciousness of Christ "whom he had believed." As he turns away from all on earth in which his heart lived, and for which he labored and toiled for so many long years; labored and toiled with sufferings unparalleled in the history of one man; and turns to Him who alone was worthy of all his heart's devotedness, to say "I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them that love His appearing."

Hear too the cry that came forth from the inmost soul of the Lawgiver, when God had said to him "Get thee up into this mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel. And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered." (Num. 27:12,13.) "Let the Lord," said he, "the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, which may go out before them, and go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord, be not as sheep which have no shepherd." (verses 16, 17).

How the heart re-echoes the spirit of such a cry! How it more distinctly turns to the Lord, that He-the Shepherd of His sheep, may act in keeping with His nature and character, and ways. How Paul's heart turns to the Lord who stood by him, and strengthened him; who delivered him, and would deliver; and the heart of the aged servant goes out to Timothy, at such an hour as is before us in his Second Epistle to his dearly beloved son; before he was "poured forth," (Chapter 4:6), as the time of his "release" was at hand.

There is something striking in the opening words of this Epistle; and that which is not the general testimony of his other writings, in that he speaks of himself as an "Apostle, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus." He refers more largely to this life-"Eternal life, promised before the world began," in his earlier letter to Titus. But here too he is an Apostle according to this "promise of life in Christ Jesus." This has marked significance in the Epistle, the whole way through. The exhortations here become more intently individual too, as things had reached the ruin which is now before us; and as this striking notice of life is so prominently pressed.

Now the tendency of the soul of man-of saints-is ever to go from one extreme to the other, almost in everything; and in hardly anything more than in spiritual things. Many who longed for truths; having found that which had delivered them from systems of men in the professing church, have been pained and disappointed at the failure and weakness of those, who with themselves had sought and found it, and walked in the divine truths of the Church of God, calling on the Lord out of a pure heart; have been disheartened at all further hopes of corporate perfectness being possible, and have leaped to the other extreme, that all being now so broken and ruined, there is nothing left but individual godliness, and a path of units drawn together by their common spiritual need.

Have we not heard it said at times, Well, the corporate testimony is over, but we have the Word, Matt. 18:20, to fall back upon-the misuse of the passage, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." All such thoughts are the cry of unbelief. So that when we get discouraged about things in the church of God, we prove that we are not, or never were, on right ground in our souls.

It is the constant tendency of the soul to get occupied with evil, and to sink down under the thought that it is greater than good. To do so is to suppose that it is greater than God! It is a great thing to count upon Him: to feel that He is over all, and would fill our hearts with the strength of His grace that is in Christ Jesus. In no Epistle do we find such varied power of evil recognized as in Second Timothy, and yet in no Epistle is boldness and courage more pressed upon the servant, in the midst of it all, than in it. "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." "Be not thou ashamed of the testimony of the Lord." "Be thou partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel." "Hold fast the form of sound words." "Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." "Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions." "Make full proof of thy ministry," etc., etc.

But I would now examine first of all, this thought of "life," which is so much before his mind. He speaks of himself as an Apostle according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus. We get back here to what was, before the world was: "eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the ages of time," but brought forth by the Gospel while time was there, and when man had been fully tried and found wanting. God "Hath saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works,"-that is, our responsibility, according to which judgment was earned; "but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus. before the ages of time. But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life, and incorruptibility to light through the Gospel."

Here we have the "ages of time," during the first man's history, passed over in silence; given before they began, and brought out when his history was past, though displayed and unfolded in the Person, and path, and appearing in this scene of Jesus Christ. The eternal life that was with the father was manifested in the Son-a Man on earth. A life of which every motion and expression was a life of communion between His Father and Himself.

One will alone-the Father's will, was done, by One alone who was the will-less, yet the One whose will, ever perfect, was surrendered, and never done: "The will of Him that sent Me," was His life. Beauteous path of light and blessing, in a world departed from God, through the will of man, instigated by the enemy. In death and by death, the perfection of obedience, without which, all the rest were imperfect.

He annulled death; He in whom there was no necessity to die, went down to death: capable of it, for in grace He became a Man, He yields that perfect life in obedience to His Father's commandment-taking upon Him in spotless purity of person, His people's sins: the wages of which is death. But more than this; bearing all the claims which God's Holy Being required for vindication against, and because of sin; He changed death from being its wages, into a pathway into life; annulling its office as the precursor of judgment to come.

Body and soul, were under its power; and instead of the death of the soul, and the corruption of the body, He brought the life of the one and incorruptibility of the other to light, by the glad tidings of His victory! This life was promised before the ages; manifested in Him, as Man on earth, and now has shined forth in the Gospel.

"Faithful is the word" to His own-"if we have co-died with Him, we shall also co-live. If we suffer, we shall co-reign. (Chapter 2:11.)

And again "All that desire to Live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution." (Chapter 3:12.) In Paul's life we see a pattern of this in a striking way. And now at the end of such a course he can turn to Timothy and recall it in the words "Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of Life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium; at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me."

I would remark here that these Scriptures (Chaps. iii. and iv. of 2 Timothy), are the fore-castings of the Spirit of God, as to the state of things which would intervene at once when the Apostolic service in the church would end.

"The last days" at once began when Paul was gone. John who outlived him could tell us

"Little children it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18). So James, "Ye have heaped treasure together in the last days." (James 5:3) "The Judge standeth before the door." (Chapter 5:9.) So Peter, "Ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter 1:5) "The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God." (1 Peter 4:17.) "There shall come in the last days scoffers." (2 Peter 3:3.) "The last days" is not merely the time in which we live, in the close of nineteen centuries. It is an expression technically used by all the Apostles descriptive of the then. moral state that had come or was just coming in.

But now mark what comes next. This life in Christ-possessed by His own: "Christ is our life," would be opposed by the "form of godliness," in the ruined, professing body. We have already cited his words (2 Tim. 3) as to what men would become under His name; the "form of godliness" possessed-the "power" denied: from such the true hearted would "turn away." Distinct positive departure from all that bore not the impress in practical power, of this life, lived and expressed.

This resistance of the truth would be seen in a remarkable way, by an imitation, a counterfeit which would go far to deceive. The aged Apostle reverts to the first moments of Israel's history when they were in Egypt, before deliverance. When they were still captives under Satan's power.

God had sent Moses to deliver them, and Aaron was to be his mouth-piece and prophet. They went in to speak to Pharaoh, as the Lord had commanded, and Aaron cast down his rod, at the demand of Pharaoh to show a proof of their divine mission; and Aaron's rod became a serpent. The rod (the sign of power) had become Satanic, and under this the people were held captive. Just as in the profession of Christianity the form of godliness had all its power from the enemy, and was without the power of life by the truth. Moses fled before it, when first it was shown him by God in the desert; and now the faithful would also flee, or turn away.

Pharaoh calls now the wise men and sorcerers; the Jannes and Jambres of that day, who resisted the truth; and they cast down their rods, which also became serpents. Thus the Testimony of the Lord was frustrated by Satan's power. "And Pharaoh's heart was hardened."

Again the Lord presents further signs of power. Aaron, at His commandment, takes his rod and stretches it out upon the waters of Egypt; and the waters were turned to blood.

What was the sign of refreshment to man, became that of judgment and death. All this points to that terrible second enacting of these things, when the "Second angel pours out his vial of the wrath of God upon the sea, and it became as the blood of a dead man: and the third angel pours his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters, and they become blood." All became deathful, not only the masses of nations and men; but the springs and issues of all human things in that day. How solemnly are all running up at the present moment to the end-the ocean of judgment that comes upon the earth.

Another sign is given in the plague of frogs. "Stretch forth thine hand with thy rod over the streams, over the rivers, and over the ponds, and cause frogs to come up upon the land of Egypt. And Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt." Again Satan's power is put forth; and we read, "The magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt." Then the respite came; and at the intercession of Moses the plague was removed, and "when Pharaoh saw there was respite he hardened his heart" still more. How striking that the only chance of the removal of the plague rested with Moses before the Lord: those who wielded Satan's power were helpless before it, and under its power.

Now here we have this persistent and terrible resisting of the truth; not with open persecution or power; but in a way which does more to destroy it than any other. It was by imitation-by presenting a counterfeit of the true. God's servants produce a proof of their divine mission; at once this is counteracted by the enemy. Jannes and Jambres imitate the miracle, and the onlooker is confounded. Satan and God were at one, it appeared, and Israel would not be allowed to go apart from Egypt. Thus it is at the present hour. What do we hear on every side? Oh, they say in the world-churches around us, we have quite as good a gospel as that from such an one; there is no need to come apart as separatists to hear that, and so the enemy succeeds. We find that the truth of the presence of the Spirit on earth is spoken of, in such and such a church. No necessity, then, is there, to move from one section of the professing church to hear that: so also the doctrines of the church of God; of the coming of the Lord; each distinctive thing is taken up-first revealed to form His people, by the Lord, then the world-churches take them up, and the hearer-the onlooker is deceived by the counterfeit of the enemy; his conscience lulled to sleep, and the form without the power is the soporific used.

At last came another sign. "Say unto Aaron," saith the Lord, "Stretch out thy rod, and smite the dust of the land, that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt. And they did so: for Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and smote the dust of the earth, and it became lice in man and beast; all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt. And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not." (Ex. 7:16-17.)

Yes my reader mark well, that last triumph of God; evoking the word from the mouths of Satan's instruments "This is the finger of God!" Their folly is made manifest unto all. The power of Satan's deception; his specious counterfeits, are worthless, in the presence of life-living realities speak for God more than all. They could go no farther than this. Imitation might be inimitable: counterfeit might be so near the truth-so like, that all were deceived. But the life of Christ to be lived on earth-Christ living in his own, producing the deep reality of that which no imitation can ever reach, and the folly of all is made manifest as theirs also was.

This "manner of life" was seen in Paul-a man of like passions as we are. He was the exponent of his own teaching. His "purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me." Such was the course of this man. Such was a course which would put to silence the spurious imitation which was resisting the truth: ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of it.

If ever there was a time when the godly should live to Christ it is now. It is the only way in which they will put to shame the counterfeits of the enemy, in which even His own are ensnared; and force the enemy, and the world around which he leads and governs to say, "This is the finger of God." God alone can produce life, and give the power and grace to live it here below. It alone is fragrant in His sight. "The life of Jesus made manifest in our body." May we be stirred to the depths of our souls with the thought of this victory, which we can indeed give Him over the enemy, even our faith; overcoming the world which He has passed through in His own perfection. "I have overcome the world." It is a beaten foe. Our faith in Him keeps us dependent and "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:4.)

Thus "life," which walks with God, and waits for Christ, and serves Him while it waits, is the subject initiative in his teaching here. (2 Tim. 1.) It was promised in Christ Jesus before the world was: exhibited in Him on earth; (2 Tim. 1:10), brought to light by the glad tidings of His work and victory. (2 Tim. 1:10.) Those who have died with Him shall also live with Him, if we look onward to the future. (2 Tim.

11.) It was seen in Paul as a present thing, as he walked and served continually. (2 Tim.

10.) The enemy would frustrate it by his counterfeits but be brought to shame by a lowly, unworldly, devoted and separate walk with God. (2 Tim. 3:8,9.) And all that would thus live godly in Christ Jesus would suffer. (2 Tim. 3:12.)

Still, the servant was to "continue in the things which thou hast learned, and been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them." Never would there come a moment when such were to be abandoned; "Paul's doctrine" was the last revelation ever given; it was God's secret to those that fear Him who had an ear to hear. Until we all come in the unity of the faith, it would abide; because the Holy Ghost on earth remained. It has been the last truth restored to the church of God, as it was the last given; and when it was lost at the first, complete ruin supervened; and now when refused, or abused, by taking it up in the form without the power, it sounds as the tocsin to all further progress in those who are thus beguiled of the enemy.

The Scriptures of God are completed by the doctrine of the church through Paul. "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the assembly; whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given unto me for you, to complete the Word of God." (Col. 1:24,25.) A segment of the complete circle of revelation was wanted when Paul was called, and by his doctrine all is told; there is no advance beyond it. John may unfold what was already spoken of, but no further truth is revealed. To go beyond it, and the Scriptures completed by it, is the spirit of error; of antichrist. John can tell the elect lady and her children "that many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not Jesus Christ coming in flesh. This is the deceiver, and the antichrist."... (and) "Whosoever goes forward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God."

How completely does the Spirit of God pronounce against all advance, all development; and all that would not abide in what was "from the beginning," i. e., from the complete revelation of the truth in Christ, unfolded through His Apostles by the Holy Ghost. John could say again "He that knoweth God heareth us: he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error." (1 John 4:6.)

God has cast His people over on the Scriptures, in the last days. "I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32), said the Apostle to the elders at Ephesus, where "grievous wolves were entering, not sparing the flock." "Continue," says he to Timothy, as to all of us, "thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing from whom thou hast learned them; and that from an infant thou hast known the Holy Scriptures." "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect thoroughly furnished unto every good work." (2 Tim. 3:14,16.)

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