2 Timothy - Commentaries by William John Hocking

The Attitude of the Man of God in the Last Days, Attitude of the Man of God in the Last Days, The

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“Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began; but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: whereunto I am appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher of the Gentiles For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee, keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.”

This Second Epistle to Timothy is of special interest and concern to us as witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ in a difficult crisis.

The apostle was writing to his young friend and convert to the faith, Timothy, a man probably of a retiring and somewhat timorous disposition, and his epistle is full of the mingled affection and wisdom that were peculiar to Paul in his service as an apostle. He writes to cheer and to encourage Timothy, fearing that his courage might fail because of the dangerous times that had arisen., The days were indeed difficult for Paul and also for Timothy, and in the face of these difficulties, the inquiry naturally was, What is to be done? And the apostle writes not with the object so much of communicating a fresh revelation of truth, but to give counsel to Timothy out of the full love of his heart; and more than that, out of the rich enjoyment of the grace of God in his own heart, and for the real encouragement of his young friend towards God. And so the Epistle makes a special appeal to us in that direct and practical way which such communications always will do. The naked formal truth may convince our minds, but it does not always carry our hearts with it, and in the things of God we want not only to be clear in our minds, but to be devoted in our hearts.

SUCCESS AND FAILURE

The apostle himself evidently felt deeply the trying difficulties of that time, and I think if we consider his position for a moment, we shall not wonder at his concern. A prisoner of the gospel as he then was at Rome, he looked back over about thirty years, and he could see the great spiritual transformation which had been brought on the face of the whole world in that short time. At the beginning of that period the gospel of God's grace through our Lord Jesus Christ was first declared to men in the power of the Holy Ghost, and what an immediate victory it everywhere wrought! It spread from city to city and from province to province, and across the seas, until it seemed as if the whole world would be subjugated to Christ.

Gentiles gave up their idols, Jews gave up the law of Moses; and they both met together in lowliness and meekness at the table of the Lord, and they felt within them the active power of the Holy Ghost. The selfish became beneficent towards others, and the fleshly lusts of human nature were overcome in the lives of men by the spirit of holiness.

In this great missionary enterprise Paul had played a personal part in every direction, hence all this and more was before the great heart of the imprisoned apostle of the Gentiles whose burning desire was to preach the gospel in every place. And in Rome in his confinement he looked around, and instead of seeing that the victory of the gospel was still spreading, he saw failure and defection. Men were giving up the things of Christ and turning away from His servant, and from every direction and from every place news reached him of the apostasy of the heart and spirit of men in the churches. Again, the time was when he longed above all things to preach the gospel in Rome as well as in other places, but here in the metropolis his hands were fettered. And while other tongues were telling the good news, he had to be silent.

NOT ASHAMED

With all these things pressing on his own heart, Paul had to write and encourage Timothy whose faith seemed failing him because of the general declension. Yet in view of all the disappointment and suffering that had come upon him, the beloved apostle wrote these words which still ring out so confidently, and carry such a note of encouragement to us amid trials of a similar nature— “Nevertheless I am not ashamed.” Weighing up all his sufferings as an apostle, and looking back on his career of service to Christ, he did not consider that his words and works had been spent in vain. He was not ashamed in the day of apparent failure; and why not? because he was following and serving One Whom he knew well and had fully proved. It would be good for us to take to our own hearts these words that Paul wrote to Timothy.

We find that the apostle definitely alludes in the twelfth verse to his suffering and to the shame and reproach that had come upon him and his labors as a servant of Christ. And I want you to think of his words of bold assurance in this connection. The fact that his work had to all outward appearances failed might seem to give ground for the suggestion of possible personal reproach. Was not the blame for the apparent failure resting upon his own shoulders?

Paul had given up a great many things for Christ. He had many advantages according to the flesh that people in the world boast about “circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin” and so on—but he had given them all up for Christ, and he still counted the sacrifice but loss for the knowledge of Christ, as he told the Philippian believers.

But when his work seemed a failure, when the outward expression of the church seemed to be broken and ruined in men's eyes, did not such a result cast reproach upon him as a laborer? Did it not seem that he was the one to be ashamed of what had happened? But if he ever thought that within himself, as being a man of like passions with ourselves he well might, he was fully sustained in the depressing sorrow of

disappointment that would come upon a heart of broad and deep sympathy like his, a heart that was wide enough to take in the whole world.

Forlorn and forsaken Paul turned for support to the Lord whom he knew. There was One who had Himself learned what in its bitterest sense shame was here in this world. We know that the word “shame” may be understood in more than one sense. Shame began in the garden of Eden, when our forefathers forfeited their position by disobeying their God. How could they lift up their eyes and meet their Creator as He walked in the garden in the cool of the day? They were ashamed because they had sinned; they blushed because of their disobedience; they were like the man in the temple who would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.”

THE SHAME CHRIST SUFFERED.

Such was the attitude of the man who had sinned, but the shame that was brought out in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ was of a different nature. Reproach took a character that it had never had before to the same degree. Take the lives of the Old Testament saints, such as Job, Elijah, Isaiah, they all had their failures and their hours of shame in the eyes of others; but why was this? It was because they all failed. They had turned into the pathway of evil, and because of their backsliding, outward judgment came upon them. But when you take the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, you see there a perfect path of devotion to God. There we have the Witness who never failed in doing the will of Him that sent Him. There is the One who would allow nothing to stand in the way of perfect devotion to His Father.

But what to all outward appearances was the result of His fidelity and devotedness? Not success, but failure, not honor but shame. It was the Spirit of Christ who said through the Psalmist, “For thy sake I have borne reproach,” “Shame hath covered my face.” It was the suffering Messiah who was brought down into the dust of death. It was He who cried, “O my God, I trust in thee; let me not be ashamed, let none of mine enemies triumph over me"; but there was no answer of deliverance.

We know how the priests on Mount Carmel cried in vain to their god, Baal. They cried and cried, but there was none to hear. On the cross the devoted Servant of God cried, as the twenty-second Psalm foresaw, “Why art thou so far from helping me? Our fathers cried unto thee and were delivered, they trusted in thee and were not ashamed.” The elders of the Jews taunted the crucified Lord, saying, “He trusted in God that he would deliver him; let him deliver him now if he will have him, for he said, I am the Son of God.” But was He delivered? No, contrary to the experience of the pious and just in Israel, Christ was left in the place of ignominy and curse, till reproach broke His heart. According to the prophecy of Isaiah, Messiah said, “The Lord God will help me, therefore shall I not be confounded; therefore have I set my face as a flint, and I know I shall not be ashamed.” Nevertheless, He was brought down into the dust of death for the glory of God, where He was as ever true to His God.

In this pathway of suffering shame for the divine Name, Christ has left us an example that we should follow His steps. And so in this world, those who are on the side of truth and righteousness, those who are Christ's must expect to suffer shame for His name as Paul did.

BOLDNESS IN GOD

It must have seemed to many in those dark days at Rome as if they were trusting in a poor cause, as if God had forsaken His church, and they were left alone in a time of great peril with none to deliver, none to save, none to rescue. Beloved friends, I ask you whether you have not had similar feelings as you have seriously considered the difficult things about you to-day, not merely the obstacles in your personal pathway, but in those things that grievously affect the peace and concord of companies of Christians. When we look back over a period of thirty years or forty, as Paul did, what a saddening change we see. Some may say, Is it because God has hidden His face from us? Has He left us alone? Is He ashamed to call us brethren?

The apostle, however, does not give way to dejection, but goes on to say, “For this cause I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed.” What happened to Paul happened in a fuller degree to his Master; and should the servant expect to escape that which came upon his Master? If He cried and was not delivered, shall it not be perhaps that we in our extremity in church matters may cry for deliverance, and no deliverance will come? If it be our experience that no remedy is forthcoming, can each of us still say, “I am not ashamed; I am going on; I am continuing in the pathway"? Why? Not because of my own powers of endurance, of my own clearness of view, but for the same reason as the apostle Paul went forward in such assurance. Because said he, “I know whom I have believed.”

He thus threw the burden upon his Master. Paul had caught the spirit of the Servant of Jehovah as it is expressed in Isaiah, “I know that I shall not be ashamed.” In the apostle's stout confession is, I am bold to say, the secret of the whole business. His was the spirit of confidence and courage. It is not for me to explain what this short sentence fully means, but I may say that it is for us to prove it for ourselves.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

To know in whom we have believed is the prime characteristic of the children of God. We find in the writings of John that the whole divine family know the Father. It is the function of the eternal life given to the believer to know the Father and the Son. What does this knowledge imply? Think of it in connection with everyday life. To know a person how much it means. Day adds to day; knowledge adds to our knowledge; we progress, we know more, we know better. But what long and intimate intercourse there must be before we can pretend to know the nearest and dearest in earthly relationship to us. Much more do all of us need to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; for it is the great key to soundness and security and stability in the Christian life to know in whom we believe.

It is summit of the attainment of the fathers in Christ to know Him that is from the beginning. We have many of us been in the way with Christ some time; years of journeyings have passed, and do we not now know something about Him? Assuredly so. Let it, however, be still the aim of our lives to follow on to know the Lord, to be so habitually face to face with Him that in the intimacy of communion we get to know Him sufficiently and to rely upon Him for all things.

I think perhaps we pray more with regard to our own private family matters than we do about the matters of the church. That it should be so is a result of our weakness. Our private affairs come before us so freely and readily, and they come to us so that we cannot seem to escape them, but in the things of the church of Christ, we often seek somehow, either consciously or unconsciously to evade our responsibility, and yet, must not the cares of the church be ever before Christ? and if we know Him and the secret of His presence, can it be that He will never say anything to us about the vicissitudes of His church? No. He that lives for His members and who gave Himself for the church He thinks not

merely of the units, but of the unity of the church. Ought not we therefore to mourn over disunion, since we are heirs with Him in all the things of His glory? It must be so if we know Him in the communion of the Spirit of God.

If we do not know Him in the sense that Paul wrote here, we shall most surely give way to unseemly doubts. The disciples on the lake were struggling to overcome the threatening waves, and their Lord was with them in the boat, but asleep. They, however, did not know Him, for they came to Him and said, “Carest thou not that we perish?” What an insult! He who was about to give up His life for them, not to care that they were perishing! He cared for every hair of their head, but they did not know Him, and they had yet to learn the wonders of His love. And so they said what afterward must have been a shame to them to have said: “Carest thou not that we perish?”

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The Attitude of the Man of God in the Last Days, Attitude of the Man of God in the Last Days, The

“I know whom I have believed.” Let this expression of the apostle sink deep into our hearts as the great antidote to fear and despair. There is no need to fear nor to despair because of the apparent desolation we see in the assemblies. The church is Christ's. He gave Himself for it. Not one of His members shall be lost, but all shall be with Him to share the church's glory in the day of full redemption. Therefore, we need not fear what will be the ultimate result, because we, like Paul, know whom we have believed. We could not know the Lord Jesus otherwise than by faith. But faith in active exercise brings us near to Him and keeps us near to Him, and also gives us to know that He is near to us. We can say we did believe on Him, and we do believe on Him, and we will, through grace, go on believing Him until faith is no longer necessary.

“I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.” Paul's confidence was in the power of Him in whom he trusted, the Lord of glory who was able to keep that which he had committed to Him. It was in his view simply a question of matching powers—the power of God and the power of evil. It was impossible to doubt what would be the ultimate issue.

WITHSTANDING THE POWER OF THE BEASTS

And this exercise is often needed in the history of faith. We find an example of this courage of faith, for instance, in the case of those three Hebrew captives in Babylon in the time of the decline almost to extinction of the great system of national religion. The nation of Israel which Jehovah had called out especially to be His witnesses in the world had miserably failed, and had forsaken the true God for idols. Where was Jehovah's beautiful house of Zion at that time? Where was it? In ruins, and its chosen worshippers were captives to the first great Gentile empire of Daniel's vision of the beasts.

And with these Hebrew youths, it was a question of comparing the power of the proud emperor with the power of their God who had allowed them to be carried into exile. With a view to political unity, Nebuchadnezzar set up the image in the plain of Dura, and instructed all the subjects of his vast empire to bow down and worship one thing and the same thing. The law of Moses, where was it? It was apparently under the heel of Nebuchadnezzar. Therefore, common sense said to Shadrach and his friends, “Come, bow down and worship; you cannot resist the power of this all conquering emperor. Submit to his decree, bow down and worship.” But they stood upright; they would not bow down and worship the golden image. Was it mere stubbornness? was it mere obstinacy? Not at all. It was a calm and solemn conviction that although the temple was gone, and Jerusalem was in captivity, Jehovah was still the God of His people, and they would be true to Him in the hour of seeming defeat, for they knew Him and were convinced that He was able to save them. Before them was the furnace of fire, and there was the inflexible will of the emperor. But they in faith looked above to Jehovah, and stood fast. They trusted in God, and they were not disappointed. Who ever trusted in God and was disappointed? “Whosoever believeth in Him shall not be ashamed.”

And so these men were cast into the fiery furnace, because they refused to bow down and worship the image. But the emperor saw the three men walking in the fire unhurt, with One whose form was like the Son of God. Shadrach and his friends acted with this calm immutable confidence because they were persuaded that God was able to keep that which they had committed unto Him.

Was this not illustrated again in the days of the second empire, as we also learn from the same book of Daniel? The imperial decree went forth from Darius that there should no longer be prayer made on the earth to God in heaven. If anything were to be asked, let it be asked of the all-powerful emperor on his throne, but under penalty of death there was to be no prayer to another. Such was the decree of this emperor on the advice of his nobles. The power of the world against a believer in the unseen God had thus arrayed itself in open conflict against Daniel. The question for him was, should he for thirty days effect a compromise with his piety, because the prohibition was but for thirty days; and after all it might be argued that prayer is a private communication between oneself and God, and means might be found of escaping the threatened punishment by praying to Jehovah in secret. But Daniel's heart was brave and true, and he scorned such subterfuge.

He knew his God, and he was able to look up from Darius to the God of heaven, and because he looked up he did not fail to bow his knees and to keep his windows open towards Jerusalem. He was not afraid of the vengeance of the Medo-Persian law, because he served God and not man. He was persuaded that his God was able to keep him, nor was he disappointed. He was brought safely out of the den of lions. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

And here again is the power of the fourth Gentile empire persecuting the servant of God. Paul was exposed to an outbreak of the fury of Caesar at any moment. Any moment he might be summoned to lay down his life for his Master. Paul during his imprisonment at Rome had written to Philippi of his desire that he might have fellowship in the sufferings of Christ. And his desire was granted, for he had to meet the same world-power as his Master.

Dear friends, we must count on this factor in our lives, that owing to our discipleship of Christ we have a relentless foe in the world, who uses against us the vast resources of his power. The prince of this world is against Christ and His followers. In its opposition to us the Worldly power may take many forms, but it is for you and for me to meet it unflinchingly in any and in all its forms. To be victors we need, however, to be clear about one thing. Are we persuaded that He is able to carry us through every crisis? This may seem to us very easy and sure when we are in the meetings, but when we are actually face to face with the activities and distractions of life, how is our courage then? Let us at all

times carry with us the assurance that He is able to deliver us, and that, as He is for us, who can be against us? To be calm and serene in the hour of peril will be the test of our faith. Let not confidence in God be a mere notion that we cherish at a time like this and then go away to our homes and forget to maintain it. Faith and assurance must be put into constant practice.

CHURCH AFFAIRS COMMITTED TO THE LORD

I think, however, that the apostle has in view something further than his own personal security and blessing when he speaks of the ability of Christ to keep that which he has committed to Him. What was it that he had committed? The Corinthians first gave their own selves to the Lord. Well, Paul had committed everything no doubt. We too ought to give our own selves to the Lord. We ought not to give less, we cannot give more.

But Paul had also committed to the Lord the affairs of the church. This was his special business, so to speak. The Lord Himself had set the apostle first in the church. He had made him the foundation of the church and entrusted him with the unfolding of that mystery. He had given him the gospel of the grace of God to preach. He had committed great things to the apostle of the uncircumcision, but Paul was not deluded by his own heart into believing that he was sufficient for these things. Paul had the humility to feel that the apostolic ministry was the Lord's work and service after all. He could undertake this labor or that, but it was the Lord who was directing his labors.

As we find from his Epistle to the great metropolis, Paul particularly wished to preach at Rome, but he was not allowed to do so in the way he expected. Perhaps no man living had a greater desire to preach the gospel than he, but at Rome he had to remain silent, while others preached the word of life. He had to do what may be good for us all to do sometimes—to be quiet and to rejoice that other persons are actively employed. The apostle had to do this.

Here he speaks to Timothy of what he as an apostle had committed to the Lord. I think that the words as they are here recorded comprehend this fact among others—that the apostle of his Master had given back to Him the care of the church, his apostolic responsibility, the work that he had received direct from the Lord of glory, saying, as it were, to Him, “O Lord, I cannot serve any longer, Thou hast put me here. Thou hast confined me in prison, but preaching and teaching is Thy work, carry it on, O Lord. The church is Thine; the sheep are Thine; care for them; guard them; feed them; lead them carry them forward.” This was surely implied when the apostle wrote “I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” For the apostle committed to Him all things without exception.

This spirit should also be true of ourselves. We perhaps feel sometimes the heavy responsibility that the Lord has laid upon us in respect of what He has given us to do. We do our best, but we often feel that there is no sufficient response to our earnestness and effort. What is our practice then? Ought we not to take to our hearts the words of the apostle, to cast our care upon the Lord, and to assure ourselves that He is able to keep that deposit which we have committed to Him?

And if you read at your leisure the great prayer of the Lord recorded in the seventeenth of John you will find that the blessed Master did the same thing. He was about to leave this world, but He thought of His disciples whom He was leaving behind in a hostile scene, and what did He do? He committed them to His Father. “Thine they were and thou gavest them me. Of those that thou gavest me have I lost none, except the son of perdition. All mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them.” He was about to depart out of this world, but He first committed His followers to His Father. His Father had committed them to Him, and He committed them to His Father. What did this action display? What but that perfect union and communion between the Father and the Son which is the pattern of that between the servant and his Master.

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There is a great day coming for us all. The apostle confronted with danger as he was, and saddened by the declension around him, was able to look ahead to that day, and we all know how frequently that expression occurs in his writings. He had a day before him, just as our Lord in His pilgrimage had what He called His hour before Him—the hour of darkness, of suffering, of shame. He was ever going on to that hour. But He has set before us not an hour of deep suffering, but a day of glory, a day of light and joy and manifestation, when the few will be many, when the humble shall rejoice with the Lord, when those who have been abased for Christ's sake shall be exalted to the highest. And ought not we to let the light of that day shed its cheer upon our present pathway? The Lord who is “the bright, the morning star” meant that it should. He will not enter into the joys of that day without ourselves. He means that we shall be with Him and rejoice with Him in that day when the redeemed are at home. No power of evil can interfere then when the church is in glory. Let us seek by the grace of God to have before us that day which will make manifest those who have suffered shame for Him.

THE DEPOSIT MADE TO TIMOTHY

We have in this verse what I may call the personal conviction and assurance of the apostle amidst the darkness of the crisis that then was, and I believe that condition of things has its analogue in the present day. In the fourteenth verse we have what may be described as the special duties assigned to us for the present moment. We find that Timothy had a good deposit made with him, while there was also the deposit that Paul made with the Lord which has been our subject hitherto this evening. He had put all that concerned himself and the affairs of the church into the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. But we learn from the succeeding verse that Timothy had a deposit too— “that good thing which was committed unto thee.” There was something which the Lord had committed to him and which he was responsible to keep. Just as the Lord was keeping and guarding the deposit that the apostle had placed with Him, so Timothy is called to guard that deposit which the Lord had committed to him.

We have therefore our duties and responsibilities for the closing days. We have hitherto been referring to what may be called the sheet anchor of our position—that which gives us courage and stability because it does not change. The Lord, while He will maintain us to the end,

has not absolved us from responsibility. We are not to be idle. He has made us competent to be something and do something for Him. We are His servants, bond-slaves to Him, and therefore while the Lord, through Paul, first speaks to us of the privileges His grace has conferred upon us, He goes on to set before us our responsibility.

HOLDING FAST SOUND WORDS

In the thirteenth verse Paul writes, “Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” You must remember that the apostle's writings for the most part were not at that time widely circulated. His spoken words however were inspired words. They were not words springing from man's wisdom, but from God. They were spirit and life like the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. There was a power in them to be found nowhere else. The apostle in effect says to Timothy, “Be clear as to those sound words which thou hast heard of me. False doctrines are springing up, therefore be clear in your mind as to what I said.”

He is of course speaking as an inspired apostle. He is giving forth what the Lord gave to him, and we ought never to lose sight of that quality which the scriptures throughout possess. We are custodians of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and they are written here. They are written in book form because they are convenient for circulation, but we ought to remember that it is not sufficient to possess a copy of the whole scriptures. It is necessary for us to have the sound and healthful words of our Lord Jesus Christ and His servants in our hearts. They have the power to preserve us from evil. Moreover the words of our Lord Jesus Christ never become corrupt, because they are, as they are here called, “sound words.” And it is especially noticeable that this particular phrase occurs several times in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, with regard to the words of inspiration. When evil was creeping into the church, the apostle exhorts the man of God to cleave fast to the words of Christ and of His apostle.

If you study false doctrines, which I hope you will never have to do, you will always find that they rest upon some novel interpretation introduced by expositors. Discussions and controversies arise from these human interpretations that are put upon the words of scripture. We have the words of Christ, why should we fear for the fate of truth? Why should we formulate a creed to preserve us from error? We ought not to need a creed or a tradition of any kind for our protection from error. We have the words of scripture.

We may be helped and guided by the advice and conduct of others; that is true, but it is the “outline of sound words” laid up in our own hearts which is the great preservative from evil teaching. The evil taint is in the air, the germs of evil doctrine are everywhere about us. We want some preservative; where shall we get it? Only in the scriptures. And these scriptures are available for the weakest and feeblest. Some of the profoundest truths of revelation are expressed in words of one syllable. They are couched in the simplest terms, but they are of unfathomable depths. They are deep—so deep that none can fully comprehend, though all may enjoy them and be refreshed by them, and all will be preserved by them from those evil teachings that are about us.

THE SPEAKER OF THE WORDS

Let us then heed the apostle's advice to his son Timothy: “Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” Is there not a beautiful and tender touch in the last phrase—faith and love in Christ Jesus?

The Bible reveals Christ, and I am bold to say that, marvelous book as it is, it may appear dull and disappointing to those who read it without a sense of the living Person behind it. As a general attraction and power in the world, what are the scriptures apart from the Christ of whom they testify? Do not, therefore, let us be content with using the outward shell of spiritual things. We want to feel that living reality which gives us the knowledge that Christ is speaking to us through His word. Why do we not always find this in our reading? We think perhaps of the sentence, and not of the Speaker. Our thoughts are elsewhere, because busy things around us attract our attention. The multitude of daily cares drown the sweet and gentle voice of the Master in His word.

GUARDING THE DEPOSIT

The fourteenth verse also gives the final exhortation: “That good thing that was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.” No doubt the apostle's direct reference is to the particular responsibility that was laid upon Timothy as a custodian of the faith when he himself would be removed. There is a sacred deposit which is committed to everyone in the matter of rendering testimony to the truth of God. And by testimony I do not mean in the way of speaking and preaching. This latter service is confined to a few, for if all were teachers where would be the taught? We need to expound the scriptures to others in that most beautiful and powerful of all ways, that is, in our lives spent in close companionship with Christ. In those ways wherein we are likest Christ we shall never be proud of ourselves. To be like Him and to catch and reproduce His character we must come very low. We must bring ourselves down. He was humble, meek and lowly of heart, and to be like Him we must prostrate ourselves before Him, and then it is as we abase ourselves that we learn that joy which comes only from such communion with Him.

We are to guard with all our powers that sacred deposit by the Holy Ghost that dwelleth in us. There are many persons who naturally delight in conflict for the truth. They are like the war horse of Job. They scent the battle from afar with a fierce joy. But the apostle, I think, is not here alluding to that stern spirit. He is not speaking of contention for the truth nor of the delight of getting one's own way in an argument, but of guarding the deposit of truth by the Holy Ghost Who dwelleth in us. Against all the declension of the present time the fact remains that the Holy Spirit abides here in the world. Moreover He is the Spirit of truth, and to have that truth in the heart at all we can only receive it by the Holy Spirit, for He has charge of the whole body of truth.

THE HOLY SPIRIT, NOT EVIL DEMONS

You know how this Epistle speaks of the solemn times when the power of the evil spirits will be active to delude and lead astray. And this activity is prevalent now. I would raise a word of warning against the power of the evil one which displays itself in that particular way at the present time. Beware of the desire to traffic with the unseen powers that are not of God, nor of Christ.

You have the Holy Spirit, what else do you want? Do you want a legion of demons to maintain the faith once delivered to the saints? The Holy Spirit come down from above is guarding that sacred deposit that was first given by the selfsame Holy Spirit. We need not seek to invoke the unholy spirits that are about us. They are real and powerful enough for evil to a degree beyond our comprehension perhaps.

You have the Holy Spirit who never deceives. Beware then of the power of evil which always deceives. Satan knows that his doom is written in the scriptures, and he would turn you away from them. The Holy Spirit is with us. Listen to Him, but listen to Him with the word of God in your heart. He will not forsake you nor the church, until the Lord Himself comes and removes us all hence away into that blissful home He has gone to prepare.

May God grant that these words of Paul to Timothy may abide with us for our profit and help until the glad day of His coming!

(Concluded)

W. J. H.

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Bible Treasury: Volume N7, Permanence of Divine Things, The

“Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth. But shun profane babblings; for they will proceed further in ungodliness, and their word will eat as doth a gangrene; of whom is Hymenus and Philetus; men who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. Howbeit the firm foundation of God standeth, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his, and, Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness” (2 Timothy 2 R.V.).

In the latter part of this scripture we have truth that has already been brought before us to-day. For we have been reminded what are our duty and responsibility in the present condition of things. Only we have here a little more than a reminder of what is due from us. It is needful for us also to know what we have been made in Christ, and what we inherit in the things that God has given us and which we can never lose. If called to the path of duty we must have that which gives us strength. It is no use to go to an anemic person and tell him to have strength; he needs it. Amid the wreck of Christendom what have we still remaining? Do we not find ourselves desponding oftentimes because we look at what we have not, instead of what is secured to us in Christ?

This Epistle was written in view of what had come upon the church in apostolic times. There were those who had seen the fair scene in Jerusalem at Pentecost, when all were filled by one holy Personage. The astonishing outward unity was true not only in Jerusalem, but Gentiles were brought in, who forgot racial animosities, and the love of God was shed abroad alike in all their hearts. But how soon this faded! In half a century it was gone. In the days in which Paul writes, how much had come in to sadden his heart! It was a trial and a sorrow to such an energetic man to be shut up in Rome while tidings came in from all parts of the world that assemblies were departing from the faith, who forgot to love one another. Disciples turned away from him, forgot him, and were ashamed of his chain! If so then, what now? Men then were erring from the truth, and God's providence overruled this for our profit, that in the counsel given for that day we might have guidance in paths of similar difficulty. Hence we have words in this Epistle which send a flash of light over the dark waters of strife and confusion. Men were misconstruing the word of God; and it was needful for a workman, if he did not wish to be ashamed, to handle it rightly. It is a solemn thing to take the scissors and the paste and seek to improve the word of God. Let us heed the warning of the apostle here, and be careful to divide rightly the word of truth. Men Paul knew who had missed the mark. People like something new, and so did Hymenxus and Philetus. They talked of the resurrection as having taken place already, and overthrew the faith of some. A man who speaks to others on any subject takes a great responsibility upon himself, but how much more do those who speak of the word of God?

But the apostle has a word of cheer and comfort, and it is this which is on my mind to-night—the last words I read. “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure,” or, as it should read, “The firm foundation of God standeth.” I think it a needed word at all times; and from what has been before those assembled here to-day it is clear that it is intensely needed at this time. In face of apostasy the apostle turns to what is immoveable and imperishable. Never mind the fables of Hymenmus and Philetus; you have what God has established and which abides evermore. In spite of all that is bewildering at the present time, this is as true and fresh to-day as ever; and there is as much power in it as ever. We need not want to go back to Pentecost. What have we got now? The foundation of God. What is it? Because it is not defined people begin to speculate. You have only to consult commentators to see what confusion is the result. Some would refer you to a concordance. A concordance is excellent when used as it should be, but it is not the Bible. It will help you to find parallel references to a text, but it will not give you its meaning.

The foundation, I believe, refers here to that which God has established for the comfort of our souls. It is not one thing or another specifically, but a general word which comprehends those things He has given us in Christ Jesus. But three things are specially prominent among those secured to us in these days, and they have all been before us at various times to-day. In Hag. 2:4 we have Jehovah's word, “I am with you.” The New Testament answer to this is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ in all His fullness and sufficiency. And, blessed be God, this is not dimmed. The prophet spoke also of the Spirit and the word of God. And we still have all three (2:5).

Think now what this implies to me and to you. We have Christ as He was given to the church at the beginning. Take John's Gospel. In chap. v. the Lord is spoken of as the Giver of life, while in chap. vi. He is the Supporter of that life, its bread. And the believer whose hunger has been satisfied is the one who knows how to continue to cat His flesh and drink His blood (ver. 56).

What gives support to the soul in days like this? We look back on One who was ceaselessly active when here, yet abiding in unbroken communion with the Father; and we have the privilege of hearing His words and seeing His actings to all sorts and conditions of men. As we read these things our souls are fed. In chap. x. it is the Shepherd who cares for the excommunicated sheep of chap. 9. When through faithfulness to Him we find ourselves alone, is He not there to welcome us? He is the same to-day as ever.

In chap. 13 we have infinite comfort. The Lord Jesus Christ just before He was crucified is in the midst of His own. They are only a very few, but a Judas is there, and a Peter is there, so self-confident. But are His loving words affected by what He sees in their hearts? He speaks to lead them on in the knowledge of Himself, liable as they are to temptation; and by words and illustration intended to fasten the truth on their

hearts He washes their feet, removing the defilements of the way. Amid all the confusion of the present time we have One who acts for us in glory as in the upper room. We have Him still in this way; for amid all the wreck of ecclesiastical things this firm foundation stands.

That is John. There are some who delight to set Paul at loggerheads with the other apostles, but he is not so in the scriptures, when read aright. Nor is he as to our subject. The apostle has a deal to say to the Hebrews about the Mosaic system set aside to make way for Christ. But though the Jewish system is shown to decay, in the first and last chapters we are reminded that Jesus Christ never passes away. “Thou art the same.” “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever” (Hebrews 1:12; 13:8). It is true that we ourselves have seen things and instititions fade away; but in the person of Christ we have One on whom change can never come; and He abides in ministry as at the beginning. In the Revelation, amongst the churches where is the Lord? Still there, walking among the candlesticks.

But we have also the Spirit of God. The Lord promised another Comforter, or Paraclete; One who should be as much to them as He Himself had been here in this world. He should come down and remain until the bride of Christ is ready and the Lord comes for her. There is a lovely picture of this in Genesis 24, where Eliezer convoys Rebekah across the desert to Isaac. Is it not the blessed office of the Spirit to cheer our onward way by the ministry of Christ? The great sin of Christendom is the practical denial of the presence of the Holy Ghost. If we realized His presence when gathered together for worship, how softly we should move, how slow to speak, how much we should fear to break the silence of the Spirit! He remains in all the sovereign activity He had at the beginning. Why do we not see more of His activity? Because we look amiss; we look for great things, and forget the still small voice. Two things ever characterize the work of the Spirit. He is here to glorify Christ, and is the power by which we worship the Father and the Son. And one absolute mark of the Spirit is this glorifying Christ. But this in itself might be misleading. Hence we have a criterion. The Spirit always works in accordance with the word. There is a threefold cord—the Son could say, “I am... the truth” (John 14:6); so also, “the Spirit is truth” (1 John 5:6); and “thy word is truth” (John 17:17). If I find myself taking a certain course of action, how am I to know if it is in accordance with the Spirit? I have the word as a guide. And so we can try this on ourselves, only we prefer to try it on others!

A word now on the treasure we have in the word of God. This is only refreshing when we come to it, with human theories placed on one side. Some come with the set notion of supporting their own fancies, and look out texts accordingly. We need the word as a continual power in our own souls, and this alone can keep our souls in communion.

If we set up a religious routine of our own; it is possible for persons to fall in with it and trust to that routine for benefit to their own soul. A person may go to the worship meeting looking for a word, and, if there is no word, go empty away; and serve him right. We must go to the word of God for ourselves. Why do we not? Because it proceeds to set us right and to discover what is wrong with us. And this firm foundation abides, whatever the circumstances.

We must regard it as the word of the Lord, not one jot or tittle of which can fail. It is settled in heaven, and by it we are admitted into the counsels of the Most High. A great many think the Lord may speak to them of their personal ways, but apparently has no right to interfere with ecclesiastical matters. Some say, “I believe that where I was converted, the Lord means me to stay.” We ought to be in our ecclesiastical associations only where we can, and do, obey the commandments of the Lord.

None shall overthrow the foundation of God. But it has a seal. A foundation is supposed to be out of sight, but the word of God is above the language of the schools. We have two metaphors here. A foundation is that which is unalterably settled, and a seal is the emblem of authority. Think of it in connection with the One who put it there. The seal is open to the inspection of all. There are great truths here in God's seal and counter-seal, which all can lay hold of, and which indeed ought to lay hold of us. Without discussing the foundation, does it not come home to us as a power to comfort, that whoever may misunderstand us, the Lord knows us. The knowledge of the Lord is what we have to fall back on in the present mass of confusion.

Peter was particularly instructed as to the knowledge of the Lord. He lent the Lord his boat to preach from, and the Lord knew his circumstances as a fisherman, for He was not oblivious to the anxieties of a business man. “Let down your nets for a draft.” “At Thy word I will—just one net.” The Lord knew, but Peter did not know, or dream, how much the Lord knew (Luke 5:1-11). They enclosed a great multitude of fishes, but the net brake. The Lord said “nets,” but Peter let down one only. In John 21 there is an echo of a sadder scene—his denial. When the Lord probed his heart to the bottom, he cried, “Thou knowest.” How comforting to be brought back to this. We may be alone and scorned “the Lord knoweth.” When all doubt us, He knoweth.

One other word the apostle adds, “Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.” This cannot mean personal conduct, for if a man is a Christian at all he has given up unrighteousness. Are we then to set up to be judges of what is iniquity? We have both Guide and guide book as to this, and it is incumbent on us to depart from iniquity.

We are each building, according to the Lord's parable (Matthew 7:24-27). This is not preaching; but the man who digs deep is the one who is doing the will of the Lord. We are rearing a building in our individual lives, and now and again we shall have a storm, and then it will be proved on what we are building. If we are not building on the word of the Lord it will quiver, and shake, and go down.

Having received anything from the Lord, let us hold it fast for Him. He is soon coming, and He will then have something to say to us about our conduct. Whatever is not of Him will go, and go forever. We have not to make a way for ourselves, nor to build up our own associations. The way is here for us in the scripture. May we keep His word, for His name's sake.

W. J. H.

Continuance in Divine Things, Continuance in Divine Things: Part 1

“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a babe thou hast known the sacred writings, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

“Every scripture is inspired of God, and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction, that is in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, throughly furnished unto every good work.”

There is no question that the words we have just read have a direct application to us at this present time, and that we may take them as a direct exhortation of the Spirit to our souls, as well as a needed instruction with regard to the blessed character of the word of God. We know that these words were addressed especially to Timothy; and Timothy was a man who, unlike Paul or Peter or John or James had, so far as we know, no direct revelation himself from the Lord. The apostles were men who received at firsthand from the Lord, as did the prophets also, and both, in the power of the Spirit, communicated what they received to the church of God. But here was a person who did not himself receive from the Lord; he received what he knew from the apostles, and, therefore, in this respect he corresponds exactly with ourselves, because what we have received of spiritual knowledge we have received from the writings of the apostle and prophets. I am speaking particularly with regard to New Testament truths of course, and therefore the exhortation here applied to him, the obligation that is laid upon him, may very well be taken home to ourselves.

EARLY DECLENSION AND PRESENT DANGER

It is for us to continue, to abide in the things that we have heard. Now we know that this Second Epistle to Timothy contemplates what was a very terrible state of things a state of things which was discerned by the apostle in his day, because the testimony by the early church to the heavenly Christ had been corrupted. The truth was there, but through the inattention of the saints, through their failure in responsibility, error came in and was mixed with the truth. This mixed state of things was foreshadowed; indeed it had already begun when the apostle wrote his First Epistle, and in the Second things had developed from bad to worse. The particular evil is not before me to point out now, nor the particular aspects of that declension and apostasy. But the peculiar difficulty then, as it seems to me, was the difficulty which we all have, a difficulty arising from the fact that wherever we go, wherever we contemplate seriously the things associated with the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we invariably find this one thing—that mixed up with the truth, intimately associated with the truth of God, there is that which is not the truth; and we, if we realize our responsibilities to the Lord, if we realize the danger to our own souls of such a medley, must feel what a grave difficulty this is.

There is no sane person who wishes to poison himself; there is no person who wants deliberately to run into danger; there is no person who desires to corrupt his soul with that which is not of God. But, beloved friends, the danger that we all must feel, either more or less, is this: that we may find ourselves in association with, or imbibing that which we in our simplicity suppose to be of God, and all the while there is that connected with it which is of the enemy, and which tends to ruin the peace and joy of our hearts, and to destroy our personal communion with the Lord Jesus Christ. I suppose we have all to some degree found this.

DELUSION AS TO THE PRESENT DANGER

It is a sad thing that there are persons who are living in what we may call a fool's paradise, and who go on supposing that everything around us is all well. No, beloved friends, it is not well. A man directly in the world and not professing any allegiance to Christ may cry out, “What is wrong with the world we live in?” He believes it is the very best state of things possible, and everything is proceeding to a perfect felicity. A man of the world may talk like this, but we ought not to deceive ourselves; we ought to face the fact that we are in circumstances of considerable danger. We are usually thoughtful enough about our bodies; we would not risk injury to life or limb. As far as the body is concerned we are very careful, and take all precautions that such a thing as physical vicissitude shall not be. But is it not a fact that the soul is greater than the body? Is it not a fact that the new nature which I have by the Spirit of God, that new thing which is born of God, that this is more precious than my body? Is it not that which God has begotten in me by His word and Spirit, and which enables me to hold communion with the Highest and with Him who is on the right hand of the Highest? And if some error creeps into my heart and robs me of that enjoyment, is it not a danger? It is a danger, for while I have lost present communion, I am in a condition to lose still more; and I am sure you are all with me in feeling that this is a danger to which we are daily and hourly exposed.

SPIRITUAL DESPAIR

There are some persons who are imbued with such a sense of the extraordinary nature of the times in which we find ourselves that they think things are so hopelessly bad that it is not easy to take any precaution whatever. They say, “Let things take their course; let us go forward, and trust to God that all things will come out right in the end.” Now, in preaching the gospel we lay down the truth very emphatically to unbelievers who talk like this. It is the unbeliever who says, “Never mind about the future; let us go on; let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die.” But there are believers who, if they do not say the same thing, act in that manner. They say, “All the testimony is gone; the truth is overthrown; it is trodden under foot in our streets; and, therefore, all our responsibility is over, we can do as we please, we shall all get to heaven, and then things will be right.”

Now, beloved friends, such a spirit as this is wrong, absolutely wrong; it is a spirit of downright cowardice, to call it by no worse name. No, the truth is unalterable, and our responsibility with regard to it is unchanged. We are here in the world, and, as we surely know, in this holy book we have a sacred deposit. Did not God's ancient people esteem the living oracles a great deposit? Was it not to them a matter of national pride that to no other people did God speak with His own voice, and communicate His words? And, beloved friends, as representing the church of God, we have that word just as it was given at the beginning, and ought not we to love it? ought not we to reverence it, and ought not we to seek to be bound and guided by it?

THE CHARGE TO TIMOTHY

Well, now, in the words that are addressed to his son in the faith by the apostle, we have what applied directly to Timothy (vers. 14, 15), and in the second place what was of more general concern (vers. 16, 17). In the first two of the verses Timothy is particularly addressed, but, as we have seen, the words apply to ourselves. The apostle says to him particularly, “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them, and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Timothy learned from the apostles, and he had learned particularly the doctrine about the church of God, because it was in the apostles' day that these truths were made known, and the apostle Paul was the specially honored instrument of God to make the revelation known that there was “one new man,” no longer Jew and Gentile, but the church of God united by the Spirit of God to Christ, the living Head in heaven. This and other things the apostle had communicated to Timothy, and

Timothy was exhorted to abide in the sense of their origin and nature.

DANGER OF DRIFTING

In other cases we have an exhortation for him and others to hold fast what they had. Well, to do this we require a fund of energy. There is another exhortation to hold forth the word of life. This again requires energy. Here we are told to abide in the things that we have heard; this requires energy too, but energy of a different kind. It is more of the character of what we might call passive resistance, resisting the power of evil which tends to cause us to drift away from the truth. The truth never alters, beloved friends. The truth will never drift away from us, but we may drift away from the truth, and this is our danger. What we knew last year, what we knew yesterday we may even now be departing from: Insensibly we move, at first; the first step is easy and so near the right path that we scarcely hesitate to take it. But having taken it we have not continued in the truth. There was the truth, we had it in our hearts, we enjoyed it, but now we have left it. You all know to what I allude. I am not referring to any particular thing, any one special doctrine of the New Testament more than another, but I am certain of this, that everyone here must have realized in his heart that many things taught in the Scriptures are unquestionably from God. You have had them from the Scriptures, and they have come home with power to your souls. Suppose it to be, for the sake of an example, the truth of the Lord's coming again. When it first dawned upon our souls that there was a promise here in the Scriptures of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth, and that His personal advent was imminent, and that we were called to wait for the Son of God from heaven, did not this truth come with a power that laid hold of our hearts and affections and moved our whole beings? We knew that it was of God; we knew that it was not a cunningly-devised fable. How are we to-day? Is it that we have stepped aside from the power of this truth, or are we abiding in the things that we have heard? We are called to abide in Christ; we are called to abide in the doctrine of Christ; indeed, we must abide, beloved friends, in the place and in the associations and in the enjoyment of the truths that God has made known to us.

LEARNING AND ASSURANCE

There is a distinction here which I think we should do well to consider. The apostle says, “Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of.” Now this phrase does not at all imply that we study the Scriptures and that we thus come to a mental conclusion that they are true. We must study the Bible in quite a different manner from that in which a man studies science. A man studies science to find out the truth, and anyone that is at all acquainted with the history of science knows that its pathway as we look back is strewn with the wrecks of exploded theories which men have had to abandon. For the moment they fought for their hypotheses with their lives, but time has gone on, other investigators have arisen, and what was believed to be the truth has subsequently been proved to be a false hypothesis.

But, beloved friends, in the word of God we have nothing of this kind. We do not come to the word of God as we come to the tentative theories of a scientific text-book. We come to the word of God as to a Book which is an infallible and unquestionable authority for our souls. We come to it as the word of God; we come to it as a book which has a paramount demand upon our whole persons, and coming to it in this way we receive it by faith; and such a spirit, I take it, is what the assurance means. It is one thing to learn the doctrine of Scripture. There are persons who learn the truth of God almost of necessity. It has been their fortunate circumstance to be in the immediate sphere where the proclamation of God's special truth as revealed in the New Testament is continually ministered, and so the thing insensibly finds it way into their hearts. Did I say hearts? Let us hope so—into their minds at any rate, and they in this manner become acquainted with New Testament facts and New Testament doctrine. They may have learned the truth in such a way, but I take it the apostle meant much more than this by “assurance.”

You Must indeed first receive the truth in this way. God will not communicate anything to you or to me directly. We cannot expect a vision or a revelation. We have everything complete in the written word—everything that is good for us to know; and we are left in the world to learn these things. But, beloved friends, the question for each of us is just this: in learning scripture have we been fully assured of it, have we laid hold of it with our whole being, has the sum of our affections been concentrated upon the Living Person who is the center and subject of the revelation of God's holy word?

CHRIST IN THE SCRIPTURES

It is, in point of fact, only the personal Christ that can lay hold of our affections. We do not reverence and worship the Book as a book. We worship the Book because therein is the medium through which we know our Savior and Lord, and coming to him as our Lord we have in the Scriptures His guide-book for us. We have the Book of His commandments, not grievous to us, but still they are His commandments; and He therein conveys His word of authority to us in that sweet and winning tone of love which finds its way into our hearts, beloved friends, and causes us to feel thoroughly assured that we are hearing the voice of the Son of God.

It is thus we are “assured” of the truth of God, and in no other way. And, my beloved friends, it is of no value whatever simply to become acquainted with a set of doctrines, however judiciously they may have been selected for us. We must come to the Scriptures, to the fountainhead of all wisdom, and learn our lessons at the feet of Him who can teach us as no other can. He taught Timothy, but He taught him Christianity through His apostle. The written word was not then, it was then the spoken word, but still it was the word of the Lord. “I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you,” as Paul said. The Corinthians, like all the early saints, had the will of the blessed Lord through the lips of the apostles, but the apostles took care that their personality did not stand between themselves and their Master, and thus those to whom their communications were made were under no delusion at all. They looked through the apostles to the living God, who was giving all things through His servants.

Well, we see that there is the need of this personal assurance in the heart, and, my beloved friends, if you will allow me to say so, I think that the spot where declension invariably begins, where the sense of tiredness with the things of God commences, is invariably in the heart. We then lose our appetite for divine things, and it becomes the more difficult to abide in the things which we have learned.

THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE THINGS

The apostle here, in exhorting Timothy to abide, gives two reasons for his continuance. “Knowing of whom thou hast learned them,” is the first. What was the origin of this truth which he had known and was assured of? He had received it by apostolical authority; he received it on the word of the apostle, who had transmitted to him the word and the will of the Lord, and therefore Timothy had a divine warrant for what he believed to be the truth, and this was the reason why he should not depart from it. He was not told to cleave to a system on the ground that it

was hoary with antiquity, that it had a splendid retrospect, and could call up miraculous deeds in the past. There was no argument of this kind, no sensual appeal in any way, but the ground was simply this—the authority of the word of the Lord. And, beloved friends, I do not think we need anything further than this to-day. We are in a day of extremest difficulty, and the question, “What is truth?” is the question that is being generally canvassed, both in the world and in Christendom. But we need not to argue about the matter. We have simply to open our ears and learn, by coming to the Scriptures. Here we have the truth from the Lord Himself. Now, having received that word, having had it directly from the Lord Himself through His word, how can we do other than abide in it?

Beloved friends, what shall we say in that day when we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. The Lord has His claim upon us; we are in the world for Him. He has opened our eyes to see a little here and a little there of His revealed truth. But however little it may be it is precious, too precious to surrender; and in view of the fact that we received it from Him what shall we say to Him in the day of account if we have allowed ourselves to slip away from it? It is not that we run away from our duties; it is not that we make a violent effort and simply bolt from our responsibilities. No, beloved friends, but we slide, we move just gradually along in the contrary direction; the soporific influences of the moment creep upon our hearts and cause us to leave the positions assigned us as soldiers of Jesus Christ in the great campaign; and so we become the victims of the great enemy of our souls.

No, it remains that we have to abide in the things which we have heard and been assured of, knowing from whom we have learned them. The theories and views of men can never stand the light of the judgment-seat, but what we have from the Lord we know that He will stand to in that day. If He has told us this or that, we know that He will never charge us with holding it for Him. He has given it to us; it is for us to produce it unsullied in the day that is to come.

[W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

Continuance in Divine Things, Continuance in Divine Things: Part 2

(Continued from page 141)

The Authority of the Old Testament

But it was only a part of the whole body of truth that Timothy had received from the apostle. There was more. There was also that which he knew from the Lord from a babe. Timothy had the very excellent advantage of being brought up by pious instructresses. His mother and his grandmother instructed him from the nursery in the truths of the Old Testament, and so we have the authority of the Old Testament fully maintained here by the apostle. The apostle Paul, although himself the medium of a very great revelation, was not jealous of Old Testament claims. He placed it side by side with the New. They are the holy writings, and they were those which Timothy had known.

“Oh, but,” you say, “was not the New Testament quite different from the Old? Had they not to abandon Judaism, and turn away from Mosaic institutions and ceremonies?” Most assuredly they had. They had that which was better, but that which was better was exactly in accordance with that which was of old. There was no contradiction. The Old Testament contained the essence of the New. There was one thing wanting to bring to light the hidden secrets of the Old Testament. What was it? The Lord Jesus Christ Himself. As He said to the Pharisees, “Ye search the Scriptures” (the Old Testament Scriptures), “for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:30). On that memorable walk to Emmaus, when the Lord revealed Himself to the hearts of the two coming away from Jerusalem with all their hopes and cherished ideas dashed to pieces, then He opened their eyes, opened their understandings, and unveiled to them those Old Testament scriptures which testified of Him (Luke 24). As soon as they learned that the law, the prophets, and the psalms witnessed of the sufferings and glories of the Messiah their difficulties all vanished. For He is the key to all such closed doors.

And so Timothy, having the Old Testament scriptures and being then brought by faith to the knowledge of Christ, had nothing to surrender, nothing to unlearn. He had rather a new field of truth for his soul to revel in where he now saw that the Lord Jesus Christ was revealed in a variety of ways, His beauties being brought out by the law, by the types, as well as by promises and prophecies, in those varied characters which we also have found in the Old Testament.

Therefore it was that he had these precious things from a child, and if he did not abide in the things which he had learned he would be giving up that too. You cannot abandon one part of Scripture without the other, because the Scripture is an undivided whole; it is a complete unity. As has been said, the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old Testament lies open in the New. Put them together, and you have a perfect revelation from God. Separate them and you are in a fog, a mist, and you cannot understand either one or the other. And Timothy was to abide equally in what was of the New Testament, and in what was of the Old.

INSTRUCTING CHILDREN IN THE SCRIPTURES

There is just another point in connection with this subject, beloved friends, that one cannot help noticing in passing, and it is that these holy Scriptures which God gave by personal communication through the Holy Ghost to the prophets of old, that Book with all its holy splendor, with its profound and illimitable wisdom, could be communicated to a child. “From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures,” and I now ask you whether we have not to-day a responsibility in this respect. What was true of the Old Testament is true of both Old and New; and if Timothy derived an incomparable advantage from the instruction he received in his most early childhood—instruction in the Scriptures—ought we not to see to it that the children of this day, our children particularly, the children of our families, of our households, are in like manner instructed in the truths of Holy Scripture?

Beloved friends, it is a grand mercy of God that such a book as the Scripture, which is so profound that the most agile mind is baffled by its instructions and revelations, can, as we gather here, be taught to a child, while by teaching it to a child we are conferring upon it a priceless boon. And, looking to the fact that all around us is a sea of confusion and error, and that in public and general schools that which is not of God is communicated, along with, if not instead of it, ought we not to be the more careful that the children who are under our particular care

should be instructed in what is true and what is of God? What is of God is true, and the communication of truth is the best preservative against error.

There are some persons who say, “Let the children grow up; let them get to years of understanding; there are parts of the Scriptures which I do not understand myself, and how then can I communicate them to my children?” But, beloved friends, here we have the fact that these holy women of old, Eunice and Lois, took the little babe Timothy, and they sowed the seeds of life, while they communicated to him those holy writings which when he was advanced to the superior knowledge of Christianity he had not to surrender, but still to maintain. They were still to be a guide to him. Therefore we ought—and it is our serious responsibility—to instruct our children in the truths of Holy Scripture, since they are able to make them wise unto salvation.

WISE UNTO SALVATION

One may notice, further, that the apostle does not assume that Timothy was already wise unto salvation. Why is this? Because, I think, he needed, as we need, the wisdom for the moment; the wisdom that we had last year is not enough for to-day. We are continually finding ourselves in fresh predicaments, and in these predicaments we want something that will instruct us for the occasion. “Able to make thee wise.” What does this mean? A wise man is a man who not only acts rightly—it must be that he acts rightly, of course—but the wise man is he that acts for God; the wise man is he who is controlled by the mind of God. What is the wisdom of the world? It is the wisdom that in its prospect and retrospect is bounded by this world; it never looks beyond the confines of this present age. What did the wisdom of this world do? It crucified the Lord of glory. They looked at Him, the despised Nazarene, as of no worth; indeed, as a danger to the state and to their religion, and they crucified Him. This was the wisdom of the world. They looked at the Lord Jesus, and this was all they saw!

What is the “hidden wisdom"? What is the wisdom of God? It is the wisdom that comes from above; it is the wisdom that enables us to look at the petty things of this life with the eyes of God, that is, as revealed in His holy word. It is a great thing to be able to do this; it is a great thing to have the heavenly light upon the earthly path, and, beloved friends, herein is the value of the Scriptures. Why do we make mistakes? I think, if we were honest and sincere with ourselves, we should confess that invariably each mistake which we have made in the past was made because we did not carry out the simple instructions of scripture. We go wrong because we act according to the light of our eyes. Beloved friends, there is nothing in a man's life—you know this as well as I do, but allow me to remind you of it—there is no slight circumstance in our daily lives, whether in the home or in business—there is nothing but we may have the light of God's truth upon it.

The Holy Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, and that salvation, I take it, means more than the salvation of our souls. Do not let us narrow down the large words of scripture, nor take these grand and comprehensive terms, and just whittle them down to some little miserable definition to which we are pleased to reduce them. No, beloved friends, we want to have the exact words of God as given to us, and as we meditate upon them and consider them we shall find that we comprehend in them things that we have never dreamed of before. We need salvation every day; we need salvation from the tendencies in which we find ourselves, and into which we thrust ourselves often through our own folly. What dishonor we sometimes bring to the name of the Lord Jesus through our wanton foolishness, because we did not think soon enough, because the suitable text of scripture did not come home to our souls, nay, because we acted before it came home; we were in too great a hurry, and did not wait. Beloved friends, do not let us be in a hurry; hurry is not of God; hurry is of the world. When we leave the turmoil of the streets and find ourselves in the peace of the sanctuary, how all there is calm and quiet; not a footfall there in the presence of God; all is holy hush; all about us are signs of the greatness and majesty of Him in whose presence we are. No, beloved friends, there is no haste there; and “he that believeth shall not make haste.”

FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS NEEDED

The Scriptures are able to make us “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Now I think “Christ Jesus” is the key to all our difficulties. There are many persons who burden themselves with immense trouble because of the difficulties they find in the Scriptures. They have a long catalog of them, and they are always dwelling upon these difficulties. When you meet them they confront you with such a long list of questions upon this, that, and the other, that you feel you want a big encyclopedia to consult, and that then you would not find the answer to their posers. They ask you, and you say you do not know, and they ask somebody else, and they do not know, and so they spend their time feeding upon these husks. No, beloved friends, there are always difficulties in Scripture, and there always will he. A man who has not found any such in the Scriptures is a poor specimen of a Christian indeed. Of course my difficulties arise because this is the word of God, and because of my little mind, my little heart—oh, my beloved friends, you cannot put the ocean in a teacup—and the word of God is altogether beyond me and my feeble comprehension, and there will therefore always be difficulties. But there is a golden key which unlocks a great many of the more practical difficulties, and this key is Christ Jesus—as it is put here, “faith in Christ Jesus.” It is not, of course, the personal faith for salvation, but the faith that sees Christ Jesus, and the honor and glory of Christ Jesus in connection with the things of this life. Why am I here in M—? Why am I doing this, that, or the other, if it is not that faith in Christ Jesus is the prompting motive?

Depend upon it, there is never wisdom in our conduct, and we are not wise in being here to-night, without that faith in Christ Jesus which will enable us to solve the difficulties of this life. I do not say of scripture, but of this life—that is, difficulties as to where we should be and what we should do for God. There are always new vistas opening before us, and they look, oh, so pleasant from a distance, and the question arises, are we to go there? There are so many allurements; there is even the name of Christ outwardly connected with it; there is a great field of service connected with it; there are many holy things and associations connected with it; it all looks, oh, so pleasant and inviting. Is it that distance lends enchantment to the view? What may I do? What is it that will give me light on the way in my difficulty when there are so many voices calling me in every direction, and many using the name of the Lord? What am I to do? There must be personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for the guidance of His word.

[W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

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