

2 Timothy 2:15 (John Gifford Bellett) 57353

Miscellaneous Papers, Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

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The Second Epistle to Timothy is not only specially important to us in this day of corrupted Christianity, but it has its own peculiar force and attraction in the general moral character of it. It shows the Apostle Paul to us in a very affecting light—holding on in service, though in the midst of hardships, desertion, and disappointment, under scorn and all contradiction from without, and amid the ruin, likewise, of the Church-condition.

At the opening of it, the apostle is very personal and affectionate—a style which was natural in one who found himself in the midst of sore disappointments; for if, at such a time, there was one, a single friend, who did not join in aggravating this disappointment, such an one would naturally, nay, necessarily, have a large measure of the remembrances of the poor tried and broken heart.

And such a one, I believe, Timothy was to Paul, at the time of this epistle.

But looking at this in another light, I might say, what a victory, in the heart of the apostle, all this expresses! “Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold”—a common, natural experience. The heart has been disappointed in the scene around it, and from which it had promised itself much, and in other days had gathered something, and its tendency would be to shut itself up. But so was it not with Paul. His heart was as large, and earnest, and loving as ever; and if it cannot go forth and spread itself over a wider surface, it will return and spend its fervors over a little that remains to it.

This is an affecting sight we get of the apostle. And if Paul, in spirit, had gained such a victory as this in his own heart, he would have Timothy, “his dearly beloved son,” gain another.

In days of corruption there is a temptation to throw up all as lost, to look on all as hopeless. It was thus in Jeremiah’s day: and the day contemplated in 2 Timothy is like Jeremiah’s, a day of moral relaxation and general corruption, in the very place where truth and righteousness should have flourished. But Paul cannot let Timothy yield to this temptation. He calls on him to stir up the gift of God that was in him. However hopeless the scene of labor might be, still there was a gift of God in Timothy, and that gift was to be used.

Jeremiah had to struggle in the strength and title of such a gift, in the midst of such another scene of corruption and disappointment. And he did struggle—it may be with some infirmity, but still honestly and successfully to the end. And Paul would have his Timothy do likewise.

He arms him, however, for this struggle. He exhorts him to be “strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus.” And he reads out to him his title to be thus strong. He tells him that he had not received from God a spirit of fear, but of love, and of power; that God had already saved him; that by the appearing of Jesus death had been abolished, and life and immortality brought to light; and that the One whom he believed was able to keep all that was committed to Him, so that nothing should be lost, but all should be found in the forthcoming day of His power and glory (2 Tim. 1).

Here was title, indeed, to be “strong in the grace” of God. Timothy, like David (though in a day like the day of the capture of Ziklag), might well “encourage himself in God” (See 1 Sam. 30.)

But with this exhortation to be strong in grace, the apostle further exhorts him “to endure hardness,” and he intimates that this exhortation was the more needful, because some were teaching that “the resurrection was past already” (2 Tim. 2).

Such a doctrine overthrows faith, as the apostle here says. It is destructive of the Church’s place and calling; for she is not as yet the witness of a risen but of a rejected Christ, as far as her connection with the earth or the world goes; Christ, who is her head, being still a rejected Christ here. She knows Him in His poverty and humiliation. And this calls on His witnesses to endure hardness, to fight as those who entangle not themselves with the affairs of this life, to labor as those who are not to reap till they have labored; to remember “the seed of David” who died ere He rose, all which things the apostle here speaks of to Timothy. The word of Hymenaeus and Philetus was destructive, morally destructive of all this. They taught that “the resurrection was past already.” They encouraged the thought that the fellowship of the Church is now no longer to be with a rejected Head; and this thought has so worked (finding natural alliance with the heart of man), that the “great house,” as Paul here speaks, has been generated. Christendom (the mustard seed become a great tree) has sprung from this root, in this soil. The corrupted church has assumed the world, as though the kingdom had come.

According to all this, Timothy is here told of a house that he has to leave, and not (as the first epistle had told him) of a house in the midst of which he was to “behave” himself. That is, this epistle contemplates a time of victorious corruption, such as Christendom now is. We are, therefore, to purge ourselves from it and not strive to purge it. It is too late to attempt it. We cannot purge out leaven in a day of victorious corruption. It waits the judgment of God.

Now, it is in the midst of all this that the apostle thus addresses Timothy, “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” A most necessary word, for Hymenaeus and Philetus were at that very time doing the very contrary. They, as the apostle says of them, “concerning the truth had erred.” They said, in a general way, “the resurrection is past already.” As a universal proposition, a doctrine to be taken in all its applicability, it is false, in special application most true. But these men

who were overthrowing the faith of some, did not heed this right division of the truth. But truth itself depended on this right division of it. We are, in the perfect grace of God, to know the resurrection as past, when we think of sin and judgment. We are to know it in our conscience. We are to be free there, to have "the answer of a good conscience towards God," because of "the resurrection of Jesus Christ." We are to know Him as delivered for our sins, and raised again for our justification.

So, as to our affections, as well as to our conscience, we are to be risen or heavenly, because Christ is seated at the right hand of God. We are surely to have our objects and our hopes with Him that is risen.

As, however, to our circumstances, or in our relation to the world, we are to be the witnesses of a rejected, and not of a risen, glorified Christ.

In the world Jesus has, as yet, no place. It has cast Him out, and He has disowned it.

But this division of the word of truth Hymenaeus and Philetus would not know. They taught, as a truth of universal present application, that the resurrection was already past. And what a canker has their word proved to be. It has generated "the great house," Christendom, where a worldly and not a rejected Christ is seen, derives itself out of this error. It makes the little seed (the smallest of all herbs) a great tree, like the king of Babylon of old, where the fowls of the air lodge. It has given us Babylon instead of Jerusalem. It has given us Babylon, where we should have had Jerusalem. It has built Babylon in the land of Israel.

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