

George Philip Bible Readings

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TIMOTHY II

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1:1-2

It is not easy to fit together the various journeys Paul made at the time when First and Second Timothy and Titus were written. He refers to Ephesus and Macedonia in 1 Tim. 1:3. He refers to leaving Titus in Crete (Titus 1:5) and to the possibility of Titus joining him in Nicopolis (situation uncertain) for the winter (Titus 3:12). The reference to Rome in 2 Tim. 1:17 makes plain he is writing from that city and is in prison there. He seems to have been recently in Troas (2 Tim. 4:13) and also in Miletum (4:20). The suggestion is made by many scholars that after the imprisonment recorded in Acts 28:16, 30-31, Paul had a further period of freedom and missionary activity before his eventual return to Rome, to imprisonment and death. If we take this to be the case then we are dealing here with what is undoubtedly Paul's last letter, written possibly a mere month or two before his death. He writes as a man of mature experience to the young and somewhat uncertain minister, who is just starting out on the main part of his ministry. He is writing as a man who knows he is near to death and this gives his words added earnestness. This was not Paul's first experience of writing from prison (Philippians, Colossians and Ephesians were written from jail) but there was something new this time. In Phil. 1:19-26 he spoke realistically about death, victory, and the benefit of being with Christ, but he felt sure he would be released. In Acts 28:30-31 he was obviously given a tremendous amount of liberty for ministry and influence if not for personal freedom. But in this epistle he knows the end is near. That being so his words of personal testimony and of spiritual instruction will be of vital significance.

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1:1-2

Paul speaks as an apostle of Christ, a calling not assumed by himself but given him in the will of God and by the command of God (1 Tim. 1:1). It is his God-given authority that he is referring to here but, being conscious that his time of ministry is virtually over, he speaks of how the promise of life is his encouragement and assurance. Being grounded in the Scriptures, as we shall see (3), Paul was aware of how the great men of faith had in their time lived and died in the faith of the sure promise of God. The whole of Hebrews 11 tells of how these men kept looking forward to the promise of God, so much so that they were prepared to die in faith not having received the promise (Heb. 11:13, 39-40). Paul himself had lived and served looking to the things that are invisible (2 Cor. 4:18). Now that his life was nearly over Paul had no thought of the work collapsing as if he were vital to its continuance; rather he was eager to encourage the man who had already proved himself to be trustworthy. Paul's manifest love and tender care for Timothy are very touching and speak volumes of the holy and healthy human relationship and fellowship there had been between them. Timothy was one of Paul's own converts (1 Tim. 1:2) and a loved and trusted fellow worker (1 Cor. 4:17). Timothy was the child of a mixed marriage, his mother was a Jewess, and his father a Greek (Acts 16: 1-3). He had not been circumcised on the eighth day as was the Jewish custom, and this may signify that his father was antagonistic to Jewish faith and practice. Possibly Timothy and his mother were converted at the same time during Paul's visit to Lystra (Acts 14:6-7). The boy grew up in a divided home and this may explain something of his tentative and fearful personality. But he was a man called to a glorious destiny and it came to pass by God's grace in spite of all that was against it.

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1:1-2

We continue to paint the picture of Timothy because right from the start Paul seems to have recognised in the young man a kindred spirit, a potential minister and a friend of immense loyalty and value in spite of the difference in their ages. Consider Phil. 2:19-22 for this high valuation was shared by the elders of the church (1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14). He was not a "personality" in the accepted sense of the term, but neither was Paul (2 Cor. 10:10) and it is not surprising that the man so constantly reviled and devalued should speak up for Timothy in the rather tumultuous church at Corinth (1 Cor. 16:10-11). This same Timothy was sent to Ephesus to deal with false teachers and to keep the church on the right lines, so he must have been a man with a clear theological mind able to discern between truth and error, a capacity not always present among evangelical men. He learned a great deal by having to preach when Paul was actually present (2 Cor. 1:9). Having shared costly trials in company with Paul he was equipped to be sent to Thessalonica to hold the church firm in a time of trouble (1

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Thess. 3:1-8). All this being so, does it seem strange that Paul had to urge this man (now in his middle thirties) to forget his youth and his uncertainties (1 Tim. 4: 12)? We see in this epistle how Timothy had his struggles with paralysing fear (1:7) with human temptations (2:22) and with poor health (1 Tim. 5:23). He was certainly too soft with people and listened far too much to their prattling. But he never failed to get backing, encouragement and exhortation from his father in the faith as 1 Tim. 6:11-14, 20-21 shows. Paul's word was always the same, "Get your eyes on Christ."

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1:3-5

The words of benediction, blessing and greeting which closed the previous verse are so familiar we tend to overlook them. They speak volumes to our hearts concerning the manifold goodness of God and His provision for our every need every passing day. Paul speaks of unfailing grace, for he would never forget his "thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him" (2 Cor. 12:7). The tender mercy of God from on high that comes down, so near and so gently to meet us at the very point of our need is something that should be a source of worship (Lk. 1:77-79 AV). The peace of God, passing all understanding and ruling in his heart, which so often kept him in crisis was something he saw as the heritage of every believer (Phil. 4:7; Col. 3:15). He could not help being thankful to God and one of the things he recognised as a mighty blessing, beyond all measurement, was the godly upbringing he had received in the context of the law and promises of God to Israel (Rom. 3:1-2; 9:1-5). After his conversion Paul realised that the gospel was not a "new" thing but the fulfilment of all that had gone before, for all the teaching and symbolism of the Law of Moses was intended and designed to point to Christ and to lead to Christ (Gal. 3:24). Of course, a man can be so proud of his traditions, heritage and practices, that these things become a barrier and constitute a form of religion that keeps a man from Christ and from God. This Paul testifies to in Phil. 3:4-9. But we need to be careful before we despise the past, and it is grievous when young upstart converts begin to slander the church to whose faithfulness they owe so much. Give thanks to God for all the agencies that have brought us thus far, whether we recognised God in them or not! This is what Paul did (Acts. 24:14; 26:6-7; 28:20). He could recognise God in the past.

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1:3-5

The bond of affection between Paul and Timothy was a very personal, tender and beneficial one, and without doubt they were strengthened by each other in the Lord (cf. 1 Sam. 23:16 AV). There is more recorded of Paul's gratitude to and praise for Timothy than of Timothy's for Paul. Perhaps this was necessary for Paul was without question the stronger character and there is always the danger in such relationships that the weaker person becomes conditioned in a negative way so that he becomes more rather than less a prey to his natural inhibitions and fears. It is wonderful then to have the ripe old man here making so public his prayers for and his rejoicing in his son Timothy. Paul was not slow to say that he needed Timothy and the remembrance of the last time they parted was very fresh and not a little painful. But the great thing about this relationship is that it was so directed *to* God, grounded *in* God, and geared to the pleasurable but costly service *of* God, that it was saved from being turned in on itself and so being turned into something other than a means of grace. In many ways as parents, teachers, friends, partners and counsellors we are working with all our grace and power to lead and to enable those who are our care to grow up in grace and to be truly adult. Of course this means that we are ministering to them to enable them to become safely independent of us and to stand in their own right. This does not mean the final relationship will be less. Indeed it will be greater, for both parties will be more truly themselves and more truly fulfilled. But it does not always work out so. Our own insecurities and selfishness can seek to deny the other his rightful development, and in trying to save the relationship we destroy it. If we value one another as Paul and Timothy did we will have no regrets.

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1:3-5

We have spoken over Christmas of the mystery and wonder of faith and we must dwell on it again in the story of Timothy's grandmother and mother, so that we might encourage our hearts in God. The concern that many have for members of their families who are not converted is real and causes much distress. We must grasp all

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the encouragements of Scripture in relation to the story of Timothy. In chap. 3:15 we are told that Timothy had been acquainted with the Scriptures from childhood and that refers to his Jewish upbringing. He did not grow up in a Christian home but the reverence for the things of God that was part of his childhood training was no irrelevance. Eunice, perhaps to the great sorrow of her mother Lois, had married a man with no interest in God. But there remained in the background a God-fearing grandmother who prayed for her daughter and her grandson, perhaps grieving often that she could not interfere more in the way the lad was being brought up. It seems in due time Eunice and Timothy were both converted. Only then did it become evident that possible that Lois came to faith in Christ first, and that would not lessen her prayers, and the young man was marked out by God for a life of significant service in the Gospel. How little we know of the debt we owe to the prayers and the godly influence of those now dead and gone. Now, if the grace of God was working dynamically so long before they knew it and before there was any sign of it (think of Lois' heartbreak when her daughter married "a man like that"), should we not be encouraged to pray in faith? The fact that God's grace has invaded *our* lives means it has come into the family circle and who can tell what issues there will be. Read carefully 1 Pet. 3:1-2; 1 Cor. 7:12-16. We talk too easily of people having "no background". We underestimate God.

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1:6-7

Paul's words emphasise to Timothy the fact of God's grace in both his salvation and his call to service. The story is a fascinating one which tells of how, in the "old school" of Jewish tradition and teaching, faith had dawned and by sovereign grace three generations in the one family were brought to faith in Christ, faith that grew, matured and stood firm. Sad to say there is no mention of Timothy's father being saved and we are left wondering about him. Such are the evidences of God's hand on this family and on Timothy in particular that Paul calls him to remember his ordination and call to the ministry. This was no mere human or ecclesiastical action (1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14), it was the act of God who, with the call, grants the endowment of capacity. But as time goes on it is all too easy to forget the promises and hopes that marked our being launched into holy service. Perhaps seasons of discouragement in the work are at the root of the dying down of the flame. But the fact of our calling and equipment remains. God has not recalled his gift (charisma) of enabling and adequate grace for the work to which Timothy has been called. It is *within* him. It is as if Paul is telling Timothy to "Think what. Spirit dwells within you", and taking fresh hold on the truth, to set himself with new resolution to the work God has given him to do. There is no suggestion here that Paul is urging Timothy to seek "a new experience of the Spirit" nor to indulge in any "working up" of his emotions to make himself *feel* more spiritual. Nor is Paul putting undue emphasis on the fact of "the laying on of hands". Timothy has a work to do. He has been endowed with the gift of the Spirit (in many capacities) to do it. He must take fresh hold on this and work.

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1:6-7

Paul (7) gives a clear definition of the "gift" and says it is not something unique to Timothy but given to "us", to all believers. At the same time it is clear that Paul was exhorting Timothy who seemed to tend to allow natural reticence to hold him back from being the spiritual leader God had called him to be. This undue timidity, this fearful uncertainty and sense of inferiority, do not come from God. There seems to be an echo here of Rom. 8:14-17. Fear is the debilitating weapon of the Devil who is a liar and accuser all along the line. We must not listen to him else our own peace and the advance of the work will suffer. God has given, as a permanent blessing and enabling, a spirit of power, not necessarily making us powerful personalities (Paul was not that cf. 2 Cor. 10:10) but giving us stability and confidence of character so that we go on in spite of all odds, not least in exercising leadership and the authority that goes with it. We are not like this by nature and the holy boldness is in fact the gift of God by His Holy Spirit. But boldness by itself can be brash, unfeeling and indeed cruel, so there is also given to us by the same Spirit all that we mean by love, that gentle grace that is by no means blind or weak, that marked the whole life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Without love all our supposed gifts, graces and conquests are nothing but a raucous noise and a total irrelevance to the work of the kingdom. Read 1 Cor. 13, especially in J.B. Phillips' translation. It will become evident that the final gift spoken of here is at the heart of all. It is the spirit of self-control, keeping a firm grip on ourselves. If we cannot do this in our own lives there is little hope for our shepherding and training others.

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1:8

We must not assume that Timothy had in fact given evidence of being ashamed of the gospel. But rather we must see here the senior man exercising a ministry of encouragement to persuade the young man that he was in fact able to stand firm and to declare the whole counsel of God. This, as Paul knew, was not an easy thing to do (Acts 20:18-27). But Paul also knew that such was the over-ruling of God in His wise and wonderful ways that even the "worst" things that could happen did in fact serve the furtherance of the gospel cause (Phil. 1:12-14; Rom. 8:28). Remember that Paul was in prison, facing death, and no doubt recalling the events of his turbulent life. Time and time again his ministry had resulted in the most bitter and hellish reaction yet, in the midst of all that, the gospel proved to be the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16)[. There can be no productive ministry without sharing in the sufferings of Christ (Acts 14:22; Col. 1:24; Gal. 4:19). To preach Christ crucified will be regarded by some as indication of mental imbalance and religious irrelevance (1 Cor. 1:17-2:5). Without doubt, to be true to Christ will often mean that we will be outside the camp bearing His reproach (Heb. 13:13), But we need to remember our Lord's words about those who are not ashamed to confess Him before men (Matt. 10:32-33). Our Lord is not ashamed to be called our God nor to own us as brothers (Heb. 2:11; 11:16). What we need to remember is that the power that saves sinners is not in us at all but in the gospel. To the world the whole business of preaching is folly and weakness. The world saw only weakness in Christ's death on the Cross (2 Cor. 13:4). But the world was wrong. It was wrong about Christ and is wrong about us, for it is by the power of the resurrection within us that we live and work (Eph. 1: 19ff.).

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1:9-10

What a comfort it is to be thinking of things that simply cannot be shaken! Paul speaks of two things that abide for ever because God is the author and instrument of both: our salvation and our calling to a holy vocation. Here is a man who is ever taken up with the marvellous thing God has done for him. His salvation is the work of God, and so is ours. Think of how Paul speaks of this in Eph. 1:3-14; or how Peter speaks of the same theme in 1 Pet. 1:3-9. There is something gloriously final in the word, "saved". It speaks not only of safety, but service and destiny, all of them to be thoroughly enjoyed (Rom. 5:1-11; 8:31-39). We have indeed lost sight of something if we are not learning more and more to enjoy serving Christ, for His service is perfect freedom and wonderful fulfilment. But note that Paul says we are called "with"(AV) a holy calling and not just "to" a holy calling, although this latter emphasis is very important (1 Pet. 1:15-16). When Paul speaks to Timothy of his calling, he seems to be referring first to that sovereign grace of God which, on the basis of the redeeming death of Christ, called us and brought us to saving faith in Jesus. He is referring also to that same grace which laid hold on Timothy for the work of the ministry, and lays hold on us for whatever work God has ordained for each of us in our turn. In Christ, everything about us bears the unmistakable hallmark of the holiness of God. He did not choose us and call us for any virtue in us, actual or potential, but by His free unmerited grace (Dent. 7:6-8). It is all a source of wonder and worship and it is all totally and eternally centred on the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of that Lord Jesus Paul now speaks more fully.

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1:9-10

This salvation and calling which Paul speaks about, which are both bound up with God's perfect and eternal purpose, were given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, "ages ago" (RSV), "before times eternal" (RV), "before the world began" (AV), "from all eternity" (NEB). This is how Paul encourages a man to get on with his God-given work. He makes him consider the long vista of the working purposes of God which are not chopped up by the artificial things we call "years". Read Titus 1: 1-3 and then come back to today's verses and see how the glorious realities of eternity come right into time in the appearance of Christ on the stage of world history. His coming was no surprise for it was (as the Christmas carol says) "promised from eternal years". The whole of the Old Testament spoke of the One to come and pointed towards His coming. All we mean by the gospel is bound up with the historical promises and eternal purposes of God. Little wonder Paul says to Timothy that he must not be ashamed. "Note how appropriately Paul connects the faith we have from the gospel

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with God's secret election and assigns to each its own place. God has called us through the gospel, not because He has suddenly taken thought for our salvation but because He had so determined from all eternity. Christ has appeared for that salvation now, not because the power to save has but recently been conferred upon Him, but because this grace was laid up for us in Him before the foundation of the world. The knowledge of these things has been revealed to us by faith" (Calvin). So many of the puzzling questions about God's eternal election unto salvation would be solved for us in measure (not perfectly because we cannot ever be God) if only we would set all these things in the context of the Gospel and its proclamation by which we are brought to faith. It is almost as if Paul is saying to Timothy, "Keep your thoughts centred on the great salvation of God."

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1:9-10

What a glorious gospel we have to undergird life and to give eternal assurance. The powers arrayed against us have been overthrown so that we need no longer fear (Heb. 2:14-15). Whatever our circumstances, the One who holds sway and stands in the very centre of affairs directing and controlling is our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. He has appeared, taken the stage (Titus 2:11-15) and in this assurance we proclaim the message, knowing that this same Jesus will again appear in glorious personal triumph to establish His kingdom of salvation (Acts 1:11; Heb. 9:26-28). It is the thought of such a glorious plan of salvation made plain to the world in Christ's coming that makes Paul give expression to the sweeping doxology in Rom. 16:25-27. But we fall short of the biblical statement if we think of the gospel only in terms of the demolition of the kingdom of evil and all its powers. Christ has brought out into full view all we mean by life and immortality. In bringing together "life" and "immortality" Paul seems to be stating something very positive over against the generally accepted idea of the "immortality of the soul" with its notion of the "soul" escaping from the materialistic "cage" of the body in this world. The Christian belief is in the resurrection of the *body* (1 Cor. 15:35ff.). The world to come is not some ethereal, non-substantial "spiritual" existence totally "other" compared to this world in which we now live. Life after death is not something of a second rate consolation prize but something far better, as Paul describes it in Phil. 1:23. It is as much better as a house is better than a tent. (2 Cor. 5:1-5). It is a fulfilment in every sense of the term, for nothing can harm or qualify let alone destroy this life and immortality which are ours now. In Christ we *have* eternal life (John 10:28; 1 John 5:11-12). This is indeed gospel news full of hope and assurance.

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1:11-12a

There are three specific thoughts in these verses. Paul refers to his Gospel expounded in the previous verse, which tells of life free from inherent decay, life that time cannot wear out and which death cannot touch, let alone destroy. This is always the apostolic emphasis (1 Pet. 1:3-9). We have every reason to be confident for nothing can spoil what God has done (Rom. 8:31-39). In order to serve this gospel Paul declares he was appointed both preacher and apostle. The preacher is called to be a *herald* of God, not a barrister defending God's reputation in the court of the world. He calls people to listen to the proclamation from the great King of Kings. This is privilege and thrill but it also calls for dignity. We are not to be "barrow boys" shouting our cut-price goods as if salvation was an easy option for jaded sinners. Pearls before swine is a forbidden thing (Matt. 7:6). After all, salvation's *price* was paid in full (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Paul also declares he is an apostle and therefore one who speaks with authority vested in him by God. He is a man called, sent and separated (Rom. 1:1). But he is not an aloof, detached instrument of God's work. He is a teacher who in personal contact and relationship with his pupils seeks to lead them on into the truth by both word and example, and with encouragement. Now, it was because of the nature of his calling that he suffered as he did. The things that happened to him were not accidental or incidental (Phil. 1:12). He had learned to interpret life's experiences in relation to God's purposes for him. This is the only way to make sense of life. We must remember that because of what we are and are called to do there will always be an active enemy (John 15: 18-20ff.).

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1:11-12

The suffering Paul experienced was no mere inconvenience as 2 Cor. 11:12-33 makes plain. But he had an amazing way of regarding these trials, describing them as a slight, momentary discomfort (2 Cor. 4:17). Like

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the other apostles he considered it a great privilege to be allowed to suffer for the sake of the One who suffered for him (Acts 5:40-42; 1 Pet. 4:12-14). The man who suffered the loss of all things, career, reputation, success and popularity, and who often lost colleagues who were Christians (1:15) because they would not follow on with him deeper into Christ and His service, declared that he is not ashamed. In Rom. 1:16 he testifies that he is proud of the gospel but here he seems to be saying more. He is not ashamed or embarrassed by the way things have worked out for him, even if people make the wrong assessment of both him and his work, just as they did of Christ (2 Cor. 10:10; Isa. 53:3-4). Paul is seeking to encourage Timothy to be like minded (8) for it is inevitable that Christ's servants will be devalued and demeaned. This does not mean that those who do so will be held guiltless, as Paul makes plain later in the epistle. But here Paul directs Timothy to Jesus. He declares that he knows in a personal way Him whom he has believed. Paul does not refer to a doctrinal basis, but that fact must never be used to drive a wedge between our stand on true doctrine and our personal faith in and loyalty to the person of Christ. It is not a case of "either ... or" but "both ... and". What God has joined man must not put asunder. Acceptance of and standing by certain doctrines without knowledge of a personal commitment to and fellowship with Christ is not biblical Christianity.

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1:11-12

There are two ways to understand what Paul says in v.12b. In the RSV the emphasis is on God's power to guard and keep the gospel which has been committed to Paul's stewardship, and this is indeed a comfort and encouragement. We are not left, to go it alone. The Devil can sometimes so burden us with a sense of responsibility, together with a feeling of incompetence and failure, that we can be quite crushed and be so psychologically demoralised that we are no longer able to get on with our ministry. There is no need to be like that. After all, if the truth be told *we* are in fact totally incompetent and unproductive. We can do nothing. It is God alone who works and gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:5-9). Granted we are servants and must work to our best capacity, but we look constantly to God and work in His strength, not our own. It is God who stands guard over His word to perform it (Jer. 1:12) and that word does not fall to the ground (Isa.55:11). This must be our confidence. Paul may also be speaking of what he has committed to God (AV and NIV). This would include not just the salvation of his soul and the keeping of his life but everything dear to him, his spiritual children, the care of the churches, the future of his work and the advance of the gospel. This is how Paul coped with life. He handed its every detail to God for safe custody and administration and he made it plain to all the churches that this was the way of wise ministry (Acts 14:21-26; 20: 28-32). Whether our concern is with our persons or our work we must place over against all adverse circumstances and all potential dangers and disasters the fact that God is able to keep us. Take it to the Lord in prayer and *leave it there*. Cast your burdens into the safe deposit of God (Ps. 55:22) and remember that He is greater than all (John 10: 27-30).

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1:13-14

Paul's exhortation to Timothy is set against "that Day" (12). We must not forget that there is a day of accountability, judgment, reward and loss (1 Cor. 3:10-15) referred to a further twice in this epistle (1:18; 4:8). Paul may have had in mind the parable of the talents (Matt.25:14ff.) which makes plain that stewards must be found faithful (1 Cor. 4:2). It is no use "burying the talent". Timothy must follow the pattern and guard the truth. The reference to "pattern" suggests an outline sketch and this seems to indicate that already there was in the apostolic church a clear body of truth, a doctrinal basis incorporating in summary form the fundamentals of the faith. Paul's words in v.8-10 have a hint of a doctrinal formula and already the Epistle to the Romans was in circulation. Calvin suggests that the word "pattern" signifies a vivid picture, a clear portrayal of sound doctrine right before our eyes, and this is an exhortation to be on guard against falling away from a sound and radical stand in the truth of the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Are there not many in the ministry still calling themselves evangelical but who reserve the right, often in the interest of intellect and academic integrity (which it is not), to hold unorthodox positions regarding basic doctrine, including that concerning the inspiration and authority of Scripture? Paul's words are needed today. Hold fast to the "sound words" received from God's apostles. If we take "pattern" in our modern sense we must put the emphasis on "sound words" which Paul preached, for it is not the shape of the message that counts but the content.

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1:13-14

Do the sermons preached and heard on Sundays have shape and form or are they so shapeless that the content and message will never reach the people? The preaching of the Cross can be nullified by undue human cleverness (1 Cor. 1:17); by wrong living and wrong motives on the part of the preacher (2 Cor. 4: 1-2); by departure from the truth in the heart of the preacher, even though he may never actually preach heresy (2 Tim. 2:17-18); and by reducing the preaching and exposition of Gods truth to a mere easy presentation of a framework summary of "the gospel". Paul will come to this last theme later in the epistle. Here he exhorts Timothy to exercise a ministry of "sound words", healthy words as opposed to mere speculations and philosophical wanderings. It is as if he is saying, "preach the Scriptures and you will never run out of subjects." But it is not merely biblical orthodoxy that is called for. He must preach in faith and love. If we do not believe that our ministry is something which has divine commission and unction we will never maintain it with that glad freshness which makes all the difference between a "sermon" and a "message". If we do not believe that God is in fact working through the business of preaching (1 Cor. 1:21) we will soon lose heart. Think of Paul's words in 1 Thess. 2:13. We are handling a word that has its own dynamic and authority. Note that Paul does *not* simply say that Timothy must hold the truth and preach it *with* faith and love, although that is necessary. We have spoken of the faith of the preacher but if he does not love the people he preaches to he will never win them. Love must permeate all or else we are but clashing cymbals (1 Cor. 13: 1). Paul's words emphasise *the* faith and love which are summed up in Christ.

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1:13-14

Paul's own phrase "a man in Christ Jesus" (2 Cor. 12:2) seems reflected in v.13b. Union with Christ in His death and resurrection is the glorious fact of the gospel of salvation and such a "mystical" union is necessary before faith and love in service are possible. This does not indicate some strange esoteric experience but speaks rather of grasping the fundamental truth of the gospel as Paul states it in Rom. 6:1-11 and Col. 3:1-3. It is as we abide in Christ (John 15: 1-8) that we manifest His life and become fruitful in service. Paul is insistent in urging responsibility on the young man and v.14 elaborates the message. In v.12 God stands guard, but here Timothy must guard the truth. Note carefully that we do not fulfil our responsibility simply by preaching the gospel, we must see to its safe preservation as it is handed on to the next generation. Calvin suggests that Timothy is being charged here to guard, preserve and develop his God-given gifts, for it is never right to abuse or neglect the capacities we have been given, always in subjection to the good of the gospel and the church. None of this suggests "self-effort" or "self sufficiency" for it is by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, and in every Christian (Rom. 8:9-11). Any special endowment for specific service is grounded in the fact of the indwelling Spirit and must not be thought of as something unique, independent or different. Consider Paul's emphasis on what indwells the believer, namely God Himself (2 Cor. 6:16) ; the Spirit (Rom. 8:11; 2 Tim.1:14); the Word (Col. 3:16); sin (Rom. 7:17); and faith (2 Tim. 1:5). *This* kind of introspective thinking will do us nothing but good.

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1:15-18

We know nothing at all about Phygelus and Hermogenes except this one thing recorded in Scripture for all generations. It seems they were mentioned by name because more might have been expected of them and their defection drove into Paul's soul the stake of loneliness. Whether their action was one of public opposition or criticism, whether it was one of standing aloof in silent and obvious indifference, or whether it was that they abandoned Paul in favour of some other teacher or group we cannot say. Certainly Paul was of the opinion that they, of all people, should not have done this thing. He was in prison with no expectation of release this time, facing the ultimate test of faithfulness in martyrdom after a long and costly life of ministry in which he had given himself to his people with extravagance of love. But all his suffering seemed to pale into insignificance beside the sense of dereliction. It is true to say, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Prov. 27:6) but it is equally true that there are few wounds quite so painful as those received in the house of a friend (Zech. 13:6).

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Our Lord knew this same utter aloneness in Gethsemane when His friends failed Him and could not watch with Him even one hour. But it is recorded that angels came and ministered to Jesus and one very human angel came to Paul, and his name was Onesiphorus, whose character and service we consider tomorrow. Later in this epistle Paul speaks of how the Lord stood by him in his need (4:17), and this was to be expected for Jesus had promised that He would not leave His people like comfortless orphans (John 14:18). But note well that the two discontents disappeared from the scene. Were they missed?

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1:15-18

While the names of some bring grief to the heart, the names of others are a sweet savour of Christ and a source of thanksgiving. It is a happy and favoured congregation that has an Onesiphorus, and it is a happy and blessed man indeed who can do so much good in such a quiet, unostentatious way. This piece of magnificent service was not a "flash in the pan" outburst of Christian grace and activity, for he often refreshed Paul. He strengthened his hand in the Lord (1 Sam. 23:16 AV) and was to Paul a "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36). "He braced me up" (Moffat), "He put fresh heart into me" (Phillips), says Paul, and it was fellowship rather than simply material assistance that worked this gracious work. Paul did not find it easy to be in chains, because public dishonour and the slights and misunderstanding they bring are sore to a sensitive spirit. We can all too easily underestimate the hurt people feel. Onesiphorus was not embarrassed by Paul's chains and "his example is probably cited as an indirect hint to Timothy" (Guthrie). The reference to the search made for Paul gives an interesting insight into circumstances in the headquarters of the Roman military empire which was already decaying through moral indulgence. It seems to have been all too possible for prisoners, political and religious as Paul was regarded, to disappear. We must not build up a fictitious world situation for these great men of the past. They were up against it, they were men of like feelings as we are and it cost them dearly to stand faithful to Christ. Paul was jailed; John was exiled (Rev. 1:9); James was martyred in the interest of political expediency (Acts 12:1-5). Peter had a whole church to pray for him and they were right beside him. Paul was on his own. The church at Rome seemed to be playing safe. But Onesiphorus came and ministered.

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2:1-2

The example of Onesiphorus is made the ground of an appeal to Timothy, and we need to note that the service rendered by Onesiphorus in Rome was typical of and the climax to a life of consistent loyalty and service, not least at Ephesus which was by no means an easy place to be a Christian (Acts 19:23ff). Here is a man who had given solid service long-term, and he will have his reward (1.18a). The example of one man who stood his ground and refused to defect as the Asiatics had done (1:15), and who took a stand openly with Paul when there was nothing to gain humanly speaking, constitutes a great challenge to men like Timothy. He was already in measure a public figure and perhaps beginning to know something of the subtle but powerful snare of wanting to be acceptable. Paul addressed Timothy tenderly as his son and called him to be strong. This links back to 1:8 and the suffering spoken of would be met by the grace-given strength that is in Christ. This is something we must count on. Grace will not fail or ever prove defective (2 Cor. 12:9; Phil. 4:19). Do not fail to grasp the thrilling wonder of Paul's reference to the supply of all our needs according to (on the scale of) the riches of God's glory. It is this that encourages us to want to be strong. It will never make us want to be independent nor to try to make ourselves indispensable. Paul was aware that his time of service was over and he was glad he had all along taught and instructed men to take over from him, ordaining elders in every place (Acts 14:23). Here he was urging Timothy to do the same and so guarantee that his work would outlive him. This could be done only by teaching and consolidating so that no matter what happened there would remain a residue of believers grounded in the truth, able to stand on their own feet, and equipped to teach others also.

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2:1-2

A successful spiritual ministry will produce men and women of faith who are able to stand in their own right, graduating from being babes in Christ to being servants and soldiers. Such mature Christians will never despise the ministry or the minister under whose influence they had gained so much. Paul would never allow this (1

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Tim. 4:12), nor would he ever demean those others who had laboured in the Word with him (1 Tim. 5:17-18). Nor would Paul accept the criticism that some ministers produce convert like themselves. That may not be a bad thing at all, cf. 1 Cor.11:1-2; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6. But Paul had too great a grasp of the significance of the gospel to let it be totally in the hands of one man. At the same time he bade Timothy to be careful of the kind of men he chose and called to the eldership. This is something the church must pray much about, especially in the accepting of candidates for the ministry. They must be those who have proved themselves faithful, reliable, consistent and loyal. They must also be apt to teach and have a testimony among the unconverted (1 Tim. 3: 1-7). Think of the question addressed to men being ordained to the ministry in our own denomination for it applies to elders as well as to ministers: "Are not zeal for the glory of God, love to the Lord Jesus Christ and a desire for the salvation of men, so far as you know your own heart, your great motives and chief inducements to enter into the holy ministry?" The next question in the vows calls the man of God to live a godly and circumspect life. This is Paul's burden as he looks to the future of the work. He also made plain that what Timothy was to teach was not some private message particular to one congregation but the message heard, believed and now preached by many witnesses. Read Gal. 1:6-12. Paul fought for the gospel, not because it was his invention but because it was God's Gospel.

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2:3-6

The call to stand faithful to Christ and His gospel in a day of difficulty and defection will without doubt involve the Christian soldier in hardness of life and suffering. His work is the active service of a soldier in war and the particular areas to be guarded against are the world (4), the flesh (22), and the Devil (26). This being so there will be a constant war to wage and it is a real struggle with real enemies, and it is fought in the strength of the Lord. It can be grim, with wounds, scars and casualties, together with the exhaustion that comes with a long campaign that fluctuates and develops. It is not one short, sharp battle, and the spiritual demand of it has to be shared, for no one believer, however great, can do it on their own. This is the glorious message of the story of Moses, Aaron and Hur in Exodus 17:8-12. The men at prayer, out of sight, were every bit as vital as the commander and his army on the field. Paul speaks to Timothy of the soldier's endurance, his awareness of the Captain who has enlisted him, the desire and duty to please the Captain and the need to keep his life free from entanglements. Paul is not speaking here of the dangers to spiritual service that come from evil things but of those hindrances that can stem from the natural and legitimate involvements and commitments of life. When a nation is at war, men and women have to leave their families, often for long spells, because duty demands it. There is a higher claim than family and personal fulfilment. It is not a case of denying and neglecting family commitments, although too many Christians do this, but of being wisely, prayerfully detached from them, for after all even the best of this world's blessings in Christ are temporary. Dare we say on "that day" (1:18) that we lived for family first and Christ thereafter? Read Paul's words in 1 Cor. 6:12; 7:17-35. Strong words, but they set the perspective.

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2:3-6

The thought of the soldier's endurance and commitment, together with his personal devotion to his captain and his cause, leads on to the idea of the athlete's discipline which is concerned not only with the rules of the race but also with the training for it. The issue is primarily one of self-discipline and practice, preparing yourself, studying the course, and refraining from premature and un-necessary activity so that when the time comes the whole personality and all its energy and capacity are reined in to run for the prize. The athlete puts us to shame. This is his life. To gain the prize he is ruthless in training, great in enthusiasm, willing to be coached and counselled, keeping the rules and jettisoning every competitive and hindering thing. So often we regard our Christianity and our service as "extras" and all too often we are out of training simply because of indiscipline and self-indulgence. We laugh it off, but we are so different from Paul whose attitude is described in 1Cor. 9:1-5, 15-27. No athlete wants to be disqualified, and instances can be cited "showing that athletes had to state on oath that they had fulfilled ten months' training, before they were eligible to enter the contest. An athlete who had not subjected himself to the necessary discipline would not only have no chance to win and so be crowned, but would lower the standard of the games. Severe penalties were consequently imposed on all who infringed

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the rules." (Guthrie) This is no call for false self-denial of natural capacities, natural relationships and cultural interests, for God has given us all things richly to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17). It does mean we must keep everything in subjection to Christ and His service.

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2:3-6

The soldier is very aware of what he is doing and how the battle is going. The athlete has his swift contest with the issues clearly defined and the prize immediately available. But a further illustration is needed, that of the farmer. We have had the soldier's endurance, the athlete's discipline and now the farmer's patience, that grace which is so hard to come by because it is so contrary to natural temperament. We need patience. Take a good concordance and look up the list of references to patience, not least Heb. 6:9-12; 10:32-36; Jas. 5:7-11. Very often it is only tribulation that works patience with God, with others, with ourselves (Rom. 5:3-5). The patience of the farmer challenges us. The hard work of the farmer points the way of fruitful service. If the word of God is seed to be sown, then there must be the clearing of the rubble before even ploughing can start. Then there is the harrowing, sowing, waiting and weeding before the reaping of the harvest. Do not forget the passing of time. Germination and growth cannot be hurried except in hothouses and all too often when such "forced" plants are exposed to the normal experiences of life they are so shocked they are either permanently stunted or die completely. There is a spiritual parable there. If our Christianity does not work in the real world it is fraudulent. But note finally that it is the hard working farmer who has the rights, privileges and rewards There is a spiritual as well as a practical application of the principle that if a man will not work neither shall he eat (2 Thess. 3:10). Some would get on better in Christian life and service if they worked harder at it.

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2:7

There is a suggestion here that Timothy may have been following Paul's pattern of life too rigidly and he must think things through rather than follow slavishly. Perhaps he was afraid to differ from Paul in any detail. The apostle tells Timothy to think carefully about the farmer having the first share of the fruit. After all, our Lord Himself taught that the labourer was worthy of his hire (Lk. 10:7) and Paul made a rigorous defence of this principle in respect of those who are servants of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:3-15). Now Paul refused to accept his rights and entitlements and when a great man does a thing like this for clearly held reasons and objectives, lesser mortals tend to copy the pattern without giving due thought to either the reasons or their own capacity.

We must not fall into the error of thinking that one way is more virtuous, or more spiritual, than the other when a principle is clearly stated in Scripture. We must also be careful not to put temptation or a snare in the way of another. This is one reason why Jesus taught that when we are engaging in strenuous self-denial we should not make a show of it to others, because after all it is unto the Lord we are doing it and only He needs to know (Matt. 6:16-18). Other commentators suggest that Paul is laying claim here to Timothy's unquestioned loyalty because he is a fruit of Paul's ministry, owing his conversion and growth in grace to the great man's ministry. Without doubt there is a loyalty that should stem from gratitude. Think of Paul's words in 1 Cor. 4:14-15. But spiritual parents no less than human parents must allow and indeed encourage their children to grow up and to become, in the right sense, independent. This need not involve either human or spiritual disloyalty. The commandment stands. Honour your father and mother in order that your days may be long (Ex. 20:12). But Paul himself taught that fathers are not always as wise as they might be (Eph. 6:4).

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2:8-10

Ultimately the basis of Paul's appeal and exhortation is not "my gospel" but the fact of Christ risen from the dead. It is not so much that Paul points back to the resurrection as a historical fact, which it is, as that he points to Christ risen and exalted as the direct consequence and follow-through from His life of suffering in doing the Father's will. Read Phil. 2: 5-11, noting the word "therefore" in v.9 and compare Acts 2:22-24, 29-36. Jesus endured hardness and it issued in resurrection and victory. It was for the joy that was set before Him that He endured the Cross, despising the shame (Heb. 12:1-2). It is only when we are persuaded that suffering is not futile but dynamically productive that we can go on in costly service. Death may work in us but life is worked in

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others (2 Cor. 4: 7-12). To give further encouragement to the young man Paul (possibly quoting from some accepted catechism or formula of doctrine) focuses Timothy's attention on Jesus Christ, risen and gloriously present with His people, declared to be descended from David (Rom. 1:1-4) and preached throughout the world. The reference to "the seed of David"(AV) sets the whole life, death and resurrection of Christ in the context, of God's plan of salvation which was ordered and set in motion in eternity (Rev. 5:1-6) and is worked out through the generations of history. This means amongst other things that none of us, *in Christ*, can think of our lives as just "you in your small corner, and I in mine". This thing we call God's plan of salvation was not done in a corner (Acts 26:26). It gives Christian life a great dignity and Christian suffering of all kinds a glorious interpretation.

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2:8-10

There was nothing immediately glorious about Paul's sufferings, for he was being treated as a common criminal with all the human devaluation that entailed. Read the Acts of the Apostles and see how trouble, suffering, slander and rejection were his constant experience wherever he went to preach the gospel (2 Cor.6:3-10). Paul tells Timothy that it is this very kind of experience that has a contribution to make to the advance of the work and its final victory. There is a clear connection in 1 Cor. 2:1-5 between Paul's weakness and trembling (and a history of hurt and tension lies behind that condition) and the setting free of the word of God in the power of the Spirit. Always keep in mind that far from cramping and hindering the outgoing of the Word of God our battles and struggles are in fact the vehicle of its progress. What comfort there is in v.9b. The Word of God, because it is sovereign and free, is not and cannot be bound (Isa. 55:10-11). But it is the man who goes "weeping" to sow the seed who reaps with joy (Ps. 126:6; Col. 1:24-29). If, in one area at one time regarding the work of one person or group, nothing seems to be happening and everything seems to be static, remember that in other places the work is prospering and full of encouragement. This will help us to stand and go on only if we realise that the work is *one work*, not independent bits and pieces. Persecution may hinder and hamper us and make us downright miserable but it cannot bind the Word of God. It was persecution in Acts that led to the world-wide spread of the gospel, driving the missionaries on and on to place after place. So the Word of God grew and multiplied (Acts 12:24).

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2:11-13

Read in from v.10 and see that Paul is referring to the elect who are not yet in fact saved. This echoes the story in Acts 18:5-11, for the "many people" in Corinth who belonged to God had not yet heard the gospel and the missionaries were beset with trouble and resistance. God encouraged Paul to go on with his ministry because it was through that means that these chosen men and women were to be brought to Christ. This is both the thrill and the responsibility of all preaching and testimony. You never know who is to be listening, who will hear with faith, whose prepared heart will receive the seed and bring forth fruit a hundredfold. We underestimate God and we undervalue our prayers and our preaching, just as we underestimate God's designs which are to bring us to glory by way of suffering. This is the salvation that is ours in Christ. Paul goes on, "The saying is sure" (trustworthy), it is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance (1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; Titus 3:8) that suffering and glory go together. It is generally agreed that v.11-13 are part of a Christian hymn and if so we see that the early church lived its life looking on to glory. That is a very healthy way to live and work. It is totally in accord with our Lord's words in Matt. 24:9-13. This is the gospel that Paul preached, declaring to men and women in Christ that they have died with Christ in His death to sin and have been raised with Him to newness of life (Rom. 6:1-11) so that this becomes the dynamic basis of the life of faith in which we put to death the deeds of the flesh (Rom. 6:12-14; Col. 3:5ff). It is our identification and union with Christ that is the basis of our lives, the source of our encouragement and our assurance of glory.

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2:11-13

There is tremendous spiritual logic here. If we have shared Christ's death we shall share His glory. If we endure, standing firm in faith and so confirming that we have in fact been raised to newness of life in Him, then we

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shall reign with Him. This is a great encouragement to stand firm and to go on, and it is echoed elsewhere in the New Testament, e.g. Rom. 8:17; Phil 3:10-11; 1 Pet 4:13-14. Suffering and then glory was the pattern appointed for Christ Himself (Lk. 24:26; 1 Pet. 1:11). Paul insists that suffering produces glory (2 Cor 4:17), and that the glory is such that the suffering pales into insignificance (Rom. 8:18). However in addressing Timothy the strong encouragement is set off against a solemn warning about those who deny Christ. We dare not minimise the solemnity of these words with their eternal significance, for they reflect the words of Jesus Himself in Matt. 10:32-33. We consider the equally solemn words in Heb. 6:1-12 and the factual statement about Esau in Heb 12:15-17. To go back from Christ and to deny the Lord that bought us (2 Per.2:1) is the way to judgment, for we cannot even plead ignorance. It is wilful, and this seems to indicate the true meaning of the next words. Paul is still trying to encourage and inspire and, perhaps having Peter's denial in mind, he speaks a word of hope for those who, under pressure and through their own foolish pride, fall into sin and do what is a contradiction of their faith and commitment. Such must not feel crushed beyond remedy. God is faithful and just to forgive (John. 1:8, 9). In the moment of his failure Peter looked to Jesus and found the Lord was looking *to him not* away from him.

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2:11-13

The closing comments in yesterday's note must not cause us in any way to think that sin does not matter. The fact of the faithfulness of God standing sure and strong over against the faithlessness of men is not a charter to sin (Rom. 6:1) but a consolation to the frightened and shattered believer who has sinned and fallen (Micah 7:8). Of course, God's faithfulness and eternal integrity make it impossible for Him to acknowledge those who choose to stand in and by faithlessness. Faith and unbelief, faithfulness and faithlessness are not the same to God and cannot ever be. If God were to move from this position then everything would become uncertain and there would be no assurance of anything at any time. It is the unchangeability of God in His person and purposes that is our peace and hope. Consider Num. 23:19-20; Rom 11: 28-36. God's unsearchable judgments and inscrutable ways are a source of comfort because we know the character of God and He will always do right. This was the basis of Abraham's prayer life in Gen. 18: 23-25; and the same truth is affirmed in Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18 and Jas. 1:17. God cannot be moved nor will He ever move from the glorious designs of His grace in respect of the people He has chosen, called and named for Himself in the wonder of His electing grace (Eph. 1:3-6; Rom. 8:28-31ff). We do well when we sing, "Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father," to remember that it was thus in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Just as we do not need to fear the ragings of the godless (Ps. 2), neither do we need to be desolated by the apostasy of those who prove to be unbelievers (1 John 2:18-19). The work of Christ's kingdom is not dependent on men, and unbelieving men are a permanent irrelevance. This is why Timothy must not fear. God is faithful and cannot be moved.

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2:14

We must take these verses one by one because they are of such great practical import in the business of Christian life and service. It is one thing to face opposition from unbelievers outside the church and to be pressurised by circumstances outside our control, but it is another thing to be assailed from inside the church by those who claim to be spiritual and to be more spiritual than others and even more spiritual than the man God has seen fit to place in the position of leadership. God's call did not give Timothy a place of infallibility for Paul has been saying plain things about the man's weak tendencies. But it did call him to lead and to be strict and to be on guard. He must remind the church again and again of the principle of death and resurrection in Christian life and service. We die to live, and the seed falling into the ground and dying is the only way of producing fruit (John 12:24). But Paul is only too aware of how people try to escape from the challenge of the Word which slays self and pride and they reduce the whole doctrine of salvation, sanctification and service to a mere verbal game. This is not only profitless, it is a work of the Devil and ruinous to those who get involved in it. In our generation there is almost an obsession with discussion and debate, all of it of course "in depth", but there has seldom been less real listening to the word of God or more confusion leading to a lack of interest in sound doctrine. The tendency for drama and dancing to replace preaching is a movement to interest people rather than

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instruct them and is symptomatic of a generation that likes the “easy” way to quick results. We need to re-learn the principle of James 1:19-21. Faith comes by hearing, not by seeing or speaking (Rom. 10:17).

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2:14

Link this important verse with 1 Tim. 4:6-11; 5:21-22; and 2 Tim. 4:1-4. We are dealing with the ministry of the word for the upbuilding of the church and the inevitable conflicts and confrontations that result from such ministry. The first necessity is the maintenance of sound doctrine centred on the Person, the death and resurrection of Christ, which is the focal point of the entire scheme of salvation. It is such biblical ministry to which the Holy Spirit will bear witness and by which the Holy Spirit will do His appointed work (Eph. 6:17; John 16:8). It is also in the context of such ministry that alien spirits will seek to operate and by plausible words of philosophy and argumentation to steal the minds and hearts of people away from God's truth. But Timothy must have no doubts as to the presence of the Lord who both inspires and vindicates His own truth, nor must he doubt his own God appointed authority as a teacher and preacher and pastor. He must stand guard over God's flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-6). There is a time to "charge" people and to warn them to steer clear of that kind of disputing which seems to be spiritual but which is in fact a verbal game. We must know when to end a discussion, preferably before it becomes a mere argument in which the different sides take up siege positions and are afraid to move lest they lose face. We must not be afraid to "lose" an argument and to "seem" to be put to flight because we believe that God's Spirit continues His unseen work of testifying to the truth and leading people into it (John 16:12, 13). There is an arguing about the Word and about doctrines that are difficult to put into verbal form without “squeezing” the Scriptures to make them fit a pattern in which the Word is just not heard at all. It is man's wrangling and those with the poorest case who shout loudest. It does no good, says Paul. But more, it is not only profitless, it is catastrophic (that is the literal Greek word), leading to the subversion and ruin of the hearers.

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2:15

Since the issues are as radical as we stated yesterday it is vital that we should listen to the right preachers and that preachers should be right in heart and life. How many ministers have today not yet thought about what they are going to feed their people on when Sunday comes? Half the week may be past already. We are still in the presence of the Lord (14) and this is where all our work is done. If unsound words are a disaster to the hearers, so are ministers who are unsound, unprepared and undisciplined and over-tired in their own persons and motives. Consider well 2 Cor. 2:15-17. Study, do your best, give great effort and use much discipline to get down to the task of being God's minister, the kind of person who is approved by God, bearing his hallmark of authenticity and true worth, as opposed to those who are not approved but disqualified, as Paul speaks of in 1 Cor. 9:27 (the same Greek word but in the negative). To be approved means to be accepted after appropriate testing. But there is no easy way to achieve this. It means getting down to it and preparing ourselves in body, mind and spirit so that we are fitted, competent and ready for long-term service where God sets us. If we do not learn this in our immediate context we may be sent to an “Arabia” like Paul, or a “Patmos” like John, or the “far side of the desert” like Moses, or even into a “whale” like Jonah (Gal. 1:17; Rev. 1:9; Ex. 3:1; Jonah 1:17). We began speaking of ministers but the lesson applies to all. Are late nights or debilitating friendships a good training? Is it right to be so disorganised and undisciplined that we neither get the full use of working time or leisure time? Does spasmodic feeding on the Word lead to growth? (1 Pet. 2:2). What kind of preaching do we look for? Do we “buy” bread and meat or fancy cakes and sweets? (Isa. 55:1, 2). How serious are we about being of use to God?

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2:15

We must be workmen. The word speaks of energy being expended. A worker, if he has any conscience at all, will be ashamed if his work is shown to be shoddy, and sermons get plenty public examination. Sometimes the most striking thing about them is that they have not been properly prepared but simply slung together. If we are to be unashamed we should be able to present our work to God for approval before we present it to the public

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for acceptance. Of course this applies to all our work and not just our "spiritual" service, because all we do we do unto Christ. But the main emphasis here is on Timothy's exercise of his ministry in which he must handle the Word of God rightly, giving all his capacities to the task. A mere scratching of the surface will not do, for that will never feed the souls of the people. Too many sermons, following too many scholastic commentaries, spend all their time in a consideration of incidental textual and contextual matters without ever getting to the heart of the message. Sometimes a preacher grasps the message but then presents it in such a confused way that the glory of the truth is hidden rather than made plain. Timothy is urged to exercise a ministry "rightly dividing" (AV) the word of truth. Calvin speaks of a "father dividing the bread into small pieces for his children," and goes on to speak of some who "mutilate it, some dismember it, some distort it, some break it in pieces, some keep to the outside and never come to the heart of the matter." Little wonder some congregations, including evangelical ones, are dying of starvation. Lecturing (even if it is all soundly biblical) is not the same as preaching. A good cookery book is not a substitute for a good meal!

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2:16-18

A right ministry is the great corrective to pointless chatter, because the people's minds and hearts are being engaged constantly with God's living satisfying sanctifying truth. It is in places where there is no right handling of the truth that basic doctrine becomes so vague that error abounds and people are led astray by their own subjective thinking and philosophising. That is the danger of discussions. The word for right handling signifies "cutting straight" and is used of a plough driving a straight furrow, of a road-maker making his road straight, of a stone-mason squaring and cutting a stone in order to fit it into its proper place. In each of these illustrations the man concerned has a clear objective in mind and works towards it just as a cook has a specific meal in mind before starting to mix the ingredients. If, in our ministry and witness, we do not really know what we are trying to do it is most unlikely that we shall achieve it with any degree of benefit. To change the figure, the shepherd must know where the pasture is and the way to it if he is to feed his flock when they need it. Dry, unappetising food is not appealing and the least healthy will suffer first, Make sure that it is the bread of life that is broken for the people. If that is the positive challenge the negative aspect is to avoid the godless chatter spoken of in v.14 and dealt with in detail in 1 Tim. 6:3-5. Paul seems to be referring to godless and empty chatter about the Word, tossing to and fro texts and ideas for the fun of the argument or perhaps to rile the preacher especially if his sermons have probed the conscience. It needs a wise man to know when to answer questions (1 Pet. 3:15-16) and when to turn back.

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2:16-18

Paul is not advising Timothy to contract out of all areas where it will be necessary to contend with godless folk because Paul himself never did that. He is warning against people who claim to be spiritual but who constantly engage in trivialities which has a bad effect. It leads the people involved into even more superficiality, to an increasing insensitivity to God, and into a greater ungodliness of life. Bad company corrupts (1 Cor. 15:32-34) and the wrong kind of conversation is not only a bad witness it is an evil influence (Eph. 5:1-20). In fact Paul says to Timothy such talk is like gangrene, insidious, powerful, spreading and destructive. False doctrine, false speaking and false influence are all alike inspired by Hell. We need to be warned. "Their teaching finds pasture (i.e. a grazing ground) as easily as a gangrene spreads in the: human body." (Guthrie) It is so easy be taken in because such evil speakers so often appear as angels of light (2 Cor. 11:13, 14), as men and women of particular spirituality. They give that impression deliberately but the effect they have on the unsuspecting is so negative and destructive that they are marked out for what they are. There is no room here for sentimentality. Mark them and avoid them (Rom. 16:17). Paul is prepared to name them publicly as he does here with two who have erred seriously. Hymenaeus has already been spoken of in 1 Tim. 1:19-20. Delivering a man to Satan (cf. 1 Cor, 5-1-5) is a solemn thought, possibly indicating more than just excommunication from the fellowship. It means that if we choose evil rather than good, and error rather than truth, we may well have to live with our choice for ever.

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2:19

This one verse gives the kind of encouragement every minister, missionary, Christian worker and intercessor needs. There is something very sore and desolating when people depart from the faith, whether or not they break away from the fellowship. But we need to remember that it was so with Jesus (John 6:66) as it was with Paul, Timothy and with John (1 John 2:19). Even when defections are the clear result of bad influence on the part of those who call themselves Christians we must not be demoralised. What God does is for ever (Eccles. 3:14). The firm foundation of the Rock of Ages stands sure and nothing can shake it. Salvation is God's work and it is never defective. Think of Jesus' own confidence: "All that the Father gives me shall come to me" (John 6:37) and none of them will be lost (John 17:12). Christ builds His church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18), People deny the resurrection. They say it is only a "spiritual" resurrection not a bodily one, and that in consequence there is no real "heaven". Some still say, as they as they have done in the past, that Jesus was not really dead when taken down from the Cross but only in a coma so that "resurrection" has no meaning at all. Let them say what they will. The truth stands sure even if no-one believes it. But Paul goes further. He is persuaded that every plant which the Father has not planted must be rooted up (Matt. 15:13). He is also persuaded that what is of God is eternally secure. What is more it, has two seals or signs marking it out as being authentically of God. The Lord knows those who are His and has known them from eternity. Their names are in His book (Phil. 4:3; Rev. 21:27. And all those whose names are so written will give testimony to the fact by departing from iniquity.

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2:19

This verse warrants further consideration because on the one hand it is a word of tremendous assurance and comfort, and on the other it lays solemn charge on all believers to have nothing to do with things or people that are evil. In our personal lives as Christians, but even more in our Christian service, there are times when the blasts of discord come sweeping in to shake and disturb us and the waves of depression and desolation tend to demoralise and paralyse us. At such a time we feel like Elijah that all is lost and the only thing to do is to give up (1 Kings 19:4,14). At such a time we must grasp the truth that the foundation cannot be moved let alone destroyed. Therefore the righteous, the justified people of God, can go on in defiance of circumstances, assured that neither men nor devils, neither life nor death, neither the passage of time nor the convulsions of history can alter the sure course of the will of God nor separate them from the love of God (Ps. 11:3; Rom. 8:35ff). Come what may the living and polished stones are being built into the holy temple of the living God (1 Pet. 2:5) and since it is Christ Himself who is the builder, the gates of Hell cannot prevent the process (Matt. 16.18). We do well to remind ourselves that all our life and work is ever in the presence of the living God and under His discerning eye (2 Chron. 16:9) and subject to His power and providence. This is the theme of the passage in Numbers 16:5,19-24,28-32, which Paul seems to have in mind here. In a crisis situation when the work of God was being imperilled from within Moses simply said, "Let God make plain who are His." God knows unerringly His true children and when necessary makes distinction public in a radical way. Because of this it is of the utmost importance that all who belong to God should keep well clear of things and people that are not of God. It is a command not just a suggestion (2 Cor. 6:17-7:1). It is also a blessing not an imposition.

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2:20-21

Paul has been speaking of the foundation, the building of God, and the people of God, and now he uses the metaphor of the contents of a house and we must be careful how we interpret this. On the face of it Paul seems to be speaking still of those who are Christ's and those who are not. This would make the "great house" the visible church or Christendom, the sphere of religious profession, and this would link with Jesus' teaching in Matt. 13:47-50 and the separation of good and evil at the final day of judgment. But in writing to Timothy Paul was dealing with a specific situation which the young minister had to address himself to so that he would neither be deterred from nor discouraged in his work of ministry. In v.17-18 Hymenaeus and Philetus (cf. 1 Tim. 1:20) seem to be shipwrecked believers rather than unconverted men whose profession has been proved false. Paul then seems to be referring to the possibility, demonstrated in the two men named, of true believers who have been used of God and who have served well and worthily becoming less and less useful or usable in

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the household of God. They are made useless by their unfaithfulness and sin, and they are laid aside and suffer loss. The security of our salvation is glorious because it is grounded in God's eternal election. But we must never confuse this with the enjoyment of our salvation or our usefulness and reward or loss in service. We have a great salvation. What we do with it is a matter of tremendous responsibility.

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2:20-21

Link with these verses 1Cor. 3:12-15; 9:24-27; 2 Cor. 5:6-10; and 1 John 2:28, all of which passages deal with the theme of reward and loss for the believer, in this life and consequently in the life to come. There is a carelessness and irresponsibility in resting too easily in "being saved". Now note very carefully what Paul in fact said to Timothy. There are different kinds of vessels for different uses and we must be careful how we evaluate them. The marvellous cutlery, china and serving dishes, on the banqueting table are of little real satisfaction or use without the cooking pots and wooden spoons in the kitchen. Both are necessary and valuable in their own place. It is not the show or appearance that really counts. You can eat to satisfaction right out of the cooking dishes but sitting admiring a valuable china plate that is empty has a limited satisfaction. All the vessels are necessary, as Paul said to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 12:22). In the second verse today Paul made plain that it is not the "talent" of the human vessel that counts, let alone the appearance or reputation, for he states that a man can pass from a "level" of nobility or honour to that of dishonour. Timothy must see to it that he maintains his life morally and spiritually to be the most worthy use to God. The Lord's vessels must be clean (Isa. 52: 11). This is the mark of the believer who walks with God. He wants to be clean for God (1 John 3:2-3). If he makes a serious job of keeping himself clean then he will be a vessel for honour, consecrated or sanctified in the sense of being set apart for holy purpose. He will be useful, taken up and used, the kind of vessel that is exactly what the Master wants. He will also be ready, prepared and willing for every good work the Master has for him.

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2:22

Since the things spoken of yesterday are so, Timothy is urged to do two things. He is to shun or flee from youthful passions or desires. Some commentators suggest Timothy was by now in his mid-thirties. He was no adolescent but still young for the high calling and deep responsibility of the ministry in which he was called to lead the people on after the ministry of Paul. The exhortation here is concerned not with "sexual sins or other disgraceful desires or any of these licentious courses in which young men often indulge, but rather those impetuous feelings and impulses to which the excessive warmth of youth makes young men prone." (Calvin) Of course the carnal promptings and inclinations were by no means excluded, no matter what Timothy's actual age was. There is a Devil and the whole spirit and atmosphere of the world is geared to emphasise and to appeal to those tendencies which are most fleshly. This is one reason why in dress and behaviour we must be seemly lest we lead another into temptation. But Paul's counsel can never be followed in the merely negative way of abstention. He urged Timothy to run hard after right living (1 Tim. 6:10-12); to pursue faith or confidence in God, always looking to Him; to live in love, expressing it and cultivating it, for love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8) and it leads to peace and harmony in relationships, things which have to be striven for with all earnestness (Rom. 12:18; Eph. 4:1-3). There is a blessedness that belongs to peacemakers while there is a restlessness and discontent that always marks those who like causing dissension. This counsel is not to be followed on a merely individual basis but in fellowship with those who call on the Lord out of single hearts.

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2:23-26

The closing emphasis yesterday on the fellowship of the saints is now developed further. *We need* the fellowship and we must value it highly. We will cope better with ourselves, our situations and our temptations, by making ourselves part of the fellowship than by pursuing a lonely and isolated path. Of course we must allow ourselves to be drawn into fellowship. Some of the loneliest people are those who insist on making exclusive friendships and form very small inward-looking groups. These are seldom helpful or healthy. If only people would be outgoing, approaching others, talking and sharing, they would discover a whole new dimension of life and acceptance. Of course it is because the life of fellowship is so significant that the Devil tries all in his power

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to disrupt it, and that is why Timothy is urged to have nothing to do with that senseless bickering that only stirs up trouble. There are discussions set in motion with the clear objective of allowing clever people to demonstrate their cleverness. There is no real desire for instruction or edification, and all they lead to are breaches of fellowship. This is a sin against God and against the fellowship. Even when we are in the right and know it to be so, we must discern when it is wise to bring a conversation to an end. This is not weakness, nor does it mean we will allow people to speak falsehood unchecked and unrebuked. Far from it! But our manner and attitude must be such that the foolish arguer will be given every opportunity and encouragement to repent and come to know the truth. The standard set in v.24-25a is staggering, but it simply calls us to be like Jesus and to deal kindly with others as He has dealt so very kindly with us. That is reasonable! It is Christian!

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2:23-26

There are some situations so fraught with explosive potential that the only thing we can do is to keep out of them. But the time comes when the other people come to us, *or* we are constrained because of Christian responsibility, to take a dealing with the situation. It is almost certain that something will be said quite soon to rile or hurt us and it is then that we must not react in a contentious spirit. If we do, those we seek to help will immediately take up siege positions and reasonable discussion will be impossible. Guilt and disappointment both tend to make people obstinate. This is why they are called opponents. They are always over against the Lord's servant, questioning, criticising and trying to correct. But in a sense these poor people (and they are pathetic as well as bad) are opposing themselves. They are getting in the way of their own good and if we can remember this it will be easier to be gentle with them. And in that way, with careful method as well as reasonable words, we can try to teach them. We will have to be forbearing, and may have to put up with a lot of petulance, impudence and even abuse. It may well hurt us deeply, but if we can remember the serious predicament of the cantankerous and argumentative person then we will use both energy and ingenuity to lead the conversation into hopeful and helpful avenues. After all, the objective is to win them back to God, not necessarily to prove how very wrong they have been. Another thing the servant of the Lord must take into consideration is the influences operating in the contentious person's life causing him or her to be so difficult. It is interesting that the words "oppose him" (25) are translated "oppose themselves" in the AV. The awkward person may be the victim of evil influence rather than the source of it. More of this tomorrow.

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2:23-26

Timothy is warned by Paul that no matter how gracious and gentle he may be in his dealings with those problem characters they may not be recovered from the error of their ways. Sin is a dangerous thing. Straying from the truth and back-sliding from God are dangerous things. Getting involved with and under the influence of wrong-minded people who are spiritually disaffected is a dangerous thing for this reason. We have no guarantee that we will be able to return to where we once were spiritually, even when we have begun to react against our folly and begin to set it in its true light. Did David, king of Israel, ever rise to his full height again after his sin with Bathsheba? Did Esau ever find a place of repentance even though he regretted selling his birthright (Heb. 12:16, 17)? God's ways are not always restoring grace. They can be judgment. We must not ever presume upon God's grace. Think of David's words in 2 Sam. 16:11, 12 when he was being so despicably treated by graceless men. He knew, as we know about ourselves, that there are many reasons why God should not fly to our aid, our deliverance and our vindication, The prophet Amos spoke this kind of solemn word to the people in his day (Amos 5:14-15). Zechariah had the same word in his day (Zech. 7:9-14). We read the same message regarding those who refused heavenly wisdom in Prov. 1:22-33. These references, and there are others, give great point to the exhortation, "Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." (Heb. 3:8)

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2:23-26

We will never cope with Christian Service or pastoral counselling unless we reckon on the wiles and the captivating powers of the Devil. When Paul speaks of the possibility of these argumentative persons escaping from the snare of the Devil, he uses the word for "escape" which has the meaning of sobering up after a bout of

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intoxication. A drunk man is out of his senses and it is futile to try to argue with him. He cannot be reached on that basis. He is stupefied or, as Paul puts it in 2 Cor. 4:3-4, his mind is blinded. This is what happens when we get ensnared by the wiles of the Devil so that our spirits are embittered. Just like the drunk man our conscience is no longer registering, our feelings are totally unreliable, our wills are paralysed. The drunk man does not know how pathetic he is, nor the damage he does in his condition, nor the irreparable situations he may set in motion. How we need to watch and pray, guarding our souls particularly against pride and presumption and over-confidence in our own spiritual competence. Remember how Satan desired to get Peter into his power (Luke 22:31). The words "taken captive" (26) mean to be taken alive. Commentators argue as to the last half of v.26 whether "him" and "his" both refer to the Devil as it reads in both RSV and AV. The footnote in RSV reads "captured by him to do his (that is, God's) will". Others make the statement to refer to escaping from the Devil after having been captured, to do the will of God. Certainly an awareness of God's great deliverance from the snares of the Devil brings a real desire to do God's will and to serve Him better. Let this be the final thought. When we do God's will we are led along in Christ's triumphal procession (2 Cor.2:14) and this is life indeed and glorious freedom. To depart from God's will is to exchange freedom for captivity to Satan and in this there is no profit (Rom. 6: 20, 21).

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3:1

What Paul now begins to say to Timothy follows on directly from the teaching of the first two chapters and it applies to the situation then existing. Paul does not take a huge leap from the present right forward to the days immediately prior to the Second Coming. The phrase "the last days" refers to the time which began with Christ's appearance on earth. We are in fact living in the last days and if they have run since Jesus was born in Bethlehem we, even more than Timothy, must recognise that we are no more than a moment or the twinkling of an eye from that great climactic moment of history when our Lord shall come in all His glory. It remains true that He will come in such an hour as we think not (Matt. 24:44) and that is all the more reason for us to live realistically aware that we are all the time on the very border of eternity, for that is where we do in fact live. These *are* the last days (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; 1 John 2:18) and scoffers are to be expected (2 Pet. 3:1-4). All the more reason then for Timothy to stand firm and suffer if necessary (1:8), having confidence in God and the gospel (1:12), holding the truth and committing it to faithful men to carry it forward right to the end (2:2). He must refuse to be distracted by any kind of diversion (2:14) or be demoralised by the defection of even notable men in the church (2:17-18). Timothy must understand that in the last days perilous and grievous times of stress will surely come. Seasons of ever increasing wickedness will set in and exert pressure over people of God until, in the end, there comes the full manifestation of the person of evil himself. But he will be dealt with in consummate ease by the Lord of glory. If you have time read the whole of Mark 13 (or at least v.19-20) and 2 Thess. 2: 1-12.

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3:1-5

The reason for the times of trouble is simply the result of what people (who have shut God out of their thinking) are and are becoming increasingly. Were it not for v.5 we could say these verses apply to the world of unbelieving men but we are forced to recognise that right through its history there will be unbelievers found inside the professing church. Never forget that Judas was one of the twelve and Ananias and Sapphira were members of a church in days of revival. Paul has already spoken of these dangers in 1 Tim. 4:1-5, where the reference is certainly to inside the church and to people instituting an excessive, false asceticism and self-denial and making this the test of "real" spirituality. Of course you can get worldly people with no real Christian belief living this kind of spartan existence and assuming that they are thereby in some way "Christian" and followers of the "simple" Jesus. Now Paul warns Timothy of the opposite tendency in the world, in the professing church, and in the evangelical church (sad to say), with people allowing themselves all manner of indulgence in both attitude and practice. There are similarities between this list of vices and that found in Rom. 1:26-32 where Paul is certainly describing the Gentile unbelieving world in its rejection of God. But here Paul has been speaking about the church, about people sliding away from the faith and about such people being ensnared by the Devil, some of them for life. Go through the list in v.2-4 and consider how many of these terrible things are manifest

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among believers and indeed in our own lives. Are there not still those who leave Christ for love of the world as Demas did (2 Tim, 4:10)? What are the things we love? They affect us more than we know.

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3:1-5

We are told in 1 John 2:15-17 not to "love the world or the things in it" because what we love marks us out for what we are. Paul speaks of eighteen different attitudes, beginning with lovers of self and ending with lovers of pleasures. In v.5 he adds a final comment which has to do with religious hypocrisy. Guthrie comments: "Moral corruption follows from love falsely directed. Self centredness and material advantages, when they become the chief objects of affection, destroy all moral values, and the subsequent list of vices is their natural fruit." Calvin comments: "It is surprising how men who have the great sins that Paul here mentions should be able to keep up an appearance of godliness. But daily experience should keep us from being too surprised..... (the Pharisees) enjoyed a reputation for outstanding holiness, as though they were free from every stain ... Also Paul here enumerates vices of a kind that are not immediately visible and which can accompany a pretended holiness." The whole point of being a hypocrite is that you preserve the outward appearance of godliness while inwardly you live a double life (Matt. 23:27, 28). Of course God does not look on the appearance but on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do (Heb. 4:12-13). Note carefully how Paul sets self-love at the beginning because it is from this weak, ruthless and guilty idolatry that all these other things flow. There is indeed a death to die to self if we are to live in love as Christ would have us live.

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3:1-5

Let these unpleasant verses be the mirror in which we see ourselves rather than a magnifying glass by which to pore over the faults of others. Consider each aspect of attitude and behaviour that is contrary to God and see how it affects personal, domestic, social and church life. See the prevailing notes of self-assertiveness and forgetfulness of God and trace these attitudes right back to the Garden of Eden and the slanderous anti-God words and suggestions of the Devil himself. Note how many of these descriptive words are negative, denoting things that are lacking or absent. Note how all the words point to men and women whose interest and concern with this world, its goods and its empty glory Note how indifferent, untruthful, undependable and unbalanced they are, reckless and extreme in word and action. Note what a tremendous conceit they have of themselves and how the main motivation of their lives is their own selfish pleasure. What they like is what they want to do and if it conflicts with duty and the wellbeing of others it is just too bad. These people do not love God else they would keep His commandments. They maintain the form and semblance of biblical religion and in some quarters may be regarded as "great Christians" and "leading figures" because such people usually have a crowd around them and they are always good for a laugh. But when a world is dying in its sin something more than a laugh is needed. Dynamic power is needed: the sanctifying power of a godly life to lighten the darkness and to act as salt to stem corruption and to give flavour to life. These people have a name that they live but are dead (Rev 3:1). How tragic! Lord, is it I?

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3 6-9

Paul is very plain and he tells Timothy that friendliness and fellowship and co-operation are not always the best or wisest things. In v.5 he counsels Timothy to keep away from certain people. How we need to exercise discernment in these days when so many evil sects speak holy and biblical language! We need to learn that being "nice" is not necessarily the same as being true to truth and to God. There is a time to hold back and to withdraw as both Paul and John, the apostle of love, make plain (Rom. 16:17-18; 2 John 10). Today's verses refer to people described in v.5 who, thinking they are well established Christians, are busily engaged in influencing others. But notice that they are not the kind of people who go out into the grim world of human need to men and women held captive in sin so that in the power of the evangel they might win them for Christ and salvation. They don't go in for that kind of strenuous self-denying, costly service. They look for easy prey, preferably near at hand and within the congregation, and with their plausible words they ensnare the gullible.

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They influence those who are psychologically weaker than themselves and bring them into captivity to their own false spirituality. Note the technique that is used. They (and Paul could well be hinting at specific individuals) worm their way into families and give such an impression of spirituality that the women swoon over them, very possibly with romantic notions, and hang on their every word. These women Paul describes as loaded down with sins, and this may mean their own Christian lives were not right or that they had over-sensitive consciences. Certainly they were creatures of impulse, always ready to listen but never discerning the great difference between a strong personality or a handsome man and man who walks with God. Who influences us?

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3:6-9

When you go to church it is possible to be so taken up with the person of the preacher, or the elders, or the attractive and interesting person you would like to get to know better, that the possibility of any real spiritual encounter with God in His Word is remote. It is also possible so to put people on pedestals that you listen uncritically to every syllable that comes from their lips and end up with the kind of Christian life that is constantly swaying one way and another depending on the latest influence brought to bear on you. You listen to anybody which is a dangerous thing. Always check credentials first, not least with regard to the books you read. You can acquire more and more information about God and the Bible, but never come to know the truth that both sets you free and builds you up in your faith to establish, strengthen and settle you (1 Pet. 5:10 AV). But Paul does not concentrate here on the sadness of weak people who never grow up spiritually, because we must never expect more from people than they are capable of giving. He deals radically with the people who are in fact exercising opposition to the truth. Their presence in the church is an influence contrary to the truth and Paul likens them to Jannes and Jambres who, according to tradition, were two of the magicians in Pharaoh's court who countered Moses in his presentation of the claims of God and did so with counterfeit miracles (Exod.7:6-13). Of course, in Egypt it was clear that Moses was on one side and these men on the other. The issue was clear. But in Timothy's situation it was far more dangerous for this was all going on *inside* the church and these wicked men were professing Christians and accepted as teachers. In Old Testament and New Testament alike there are warnings against listening to false prophets. We must take this seriously.

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3:6-9

Paul speaks seriously, solemnly and in a radical way about the influence of wicked men, but he does so from the ground of faith not unbelief. He does not give way to fear about Timothy or about the work of God. After all, the whole issue of the work of God is in the safe keeping of Almighty God who stands over His Word to perform it (Jer. 1:12). On the other side stand these men of corrupt minds (1 Tim. 6:5), bereft of truth and incapable any more of spiritual thinking. Of course, it can seem at times that these men are carrying all before them and that God is doing nothing to stop them. But Paul insists that they will not get very far. Give them time and it will become plain to all that they are not what they seem to be. Some commentators suggest that Jannes and Jambres faded into the background after the contest with Pharaoh but took part in the Exodus and later incited the people in the making of the golden calf which brought such sharp judgment on the deceived people of God. Listen to men's words but reserve your judgment. Watch men's influence and success and still reserve judgment. Wait until it becomes evident what they have become themselves, what they have made other people, and what they have produced of abiding spiritual worth and then you will not have to pass judgment. It will be plain for all to see. By their fruits men are known (Matt.7:15-23). Paul knows that when one evil situation is dealt with others will arise, perhaps worse and more difficult to deal with. He knows very well that some will be deceived, harmed and drawn away. This is a fact of experience. But he encourages Timothy never to have a dread of evil (Prov. 1:33 AV, RSV). In the end it is God who deals with all evil in every form. And He will, sooner than some people think.

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3:10-11

When Paul speaks of his own experience it is in order to defend or exemplify the gospel or to encourage the servants of the gospel. Here he is concerned to show God's faithfulness right through the whole course of his costly ministry and he urges Timothy to follow his example, as in fact he had done. It is not just that Timothy had "observed" Paul's teaching and conduct but rather that he had taken Paul as his model. The whole pattern of the apostle's life and ministry had drawn the younger man and he was disposed to follow his teacher. In this he was different from the false teachers just referred to, who were set to "do their own thing". All methods and patterns of ministry are not equal and it is a brave or rather foolish man who casts aside tried and proven ways! Paul had come to Antioch, Iconium and Lystra gripped and mastered by the vision of the gospel and the missionary commission, and it was then that Timothy had been influenced so deeply. Being reminded of the apostle's life and ministry, Timothy is urged to follow the same pattern with the same assurance in the same God who delivered Paul in and through all his costly experiences. Read in 2 Cor. 4:8-12 of the man who was cast down but not kept down. Read in 2 Cor. 1:8-11 of a man unbearably crushed and who saw that as God's appointed means of grace to make him look to God who had delivered, does deliver and will deliver again and again. Sometimes there is assurance of deliverance (Phil. 1:19) but sometimes faith must leave the issue open (Dan. 3:16-18). All this is so important we continue the theme tomorrow.

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3:10-11

To understand the kind of suffering Paul endured for the gospel's sake we must read 2 Cor. 11:21-33, and to understand how he regarded these experiences and how he coped with them read 2 Cor. 4:16-18; Gal. 4:19; Col.1:24; Phil. 3:10; Rom, 8:18ff. and 1 Pet. 4:13. Suffering is never negative, except perhaps when we suffer for doing wrong (1 Pet. 2:19, 20), but even then God uses this for the good of His children. Now look at the list Paul gives of the various features of his life, both active and passive. He begins with doctrine because if that is wrong everything begins to go off straight. But right doctrine must be backed up by right conduct (1 Cor. 2:1-5; 1 Thess. 1:5-6; 2:3-8; Acts 20:18-24). The last of these references points us to Paul's aim and objective, for he was brought into captivity to Christ to serve Him in the gospel (Rom. 1:14-16). He was a man who was mastered. He lived by faith, looking unto Jesus (Heb. 12:1-2) and along with faith he speaks of patient long-suffering with people. This can never be the case except by the love of God in our hearts (Rom. 5:1-5). Love must be expressed and will be expressed in the context of difficulties and disappointments which call for endurance. Paul stood fast whatever came and he did so in the confidence that God delivers His people (Ps. 27; Ps. 91; Ps. 121; Ps. 124). "Why art thou then cast down my soul; what should discourage thee?" (Ps. 43:5). Of course, God sometimes deliver: His people *from* death and sometimes *by* death. Whatever means His perfect will ordains we are totally and eternally safe, for nothing in the whole order of creation has the power to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:35ff).

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3:12-13

There is a glorious simplicity and realism in Paul, and he had such an authentic view of life that scarcely anything took him unawares. He was not perfect, and his epistles show him to be sufficiently human to be at times in a state of nervous tension (2 Cor. 2:13), distracted from the immediate claims of service and capable of deep personal hurt and disappointment (2 Tim. 4:16). After his visits to the cities named, Paul exhorted them to accept that it was by way of tribulation that they would enter God's kingdom (Acts 14:21-22). In this he was totally in accord with our Lord's teaching in John 15:18ff; 16:33. Since the whole world order lies in the wicked one and is neither neutral or conducive to holy living, and since we wrestle against principalities and powers, not against mere flesh and blood (1 John 5: 19; Eph.6:10ff), Christian life cannot be other than a battle. The reason why people will hate and persecute is simply because they do not know God (John 16:1-4) and we must not expect better treatment than Jesus got. After all, the world has often good reason to dislike us because we can be very unpleasant and unattractive people at times. But, flaws and failures apart, true godliness and sincere devotion to Jesus will always trigger off reaction and resentment, not least because godliness convicts people of their sin (John 15:22). To cope with this is one thing, for we can understand it with the help of Scripture (1 Pet. 1:6-9; 4:12-19). But to cope with the apparent prosperity and advance of wicked men at the same time is a sore

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vexation. We need Psalm 73, especially v.16-17, and also the basic simplicity of Psalm 1 which contrasts the way *and the end* of the godly and the ungodly. The last word is always with God. The deceivers are themselves deceived and their foot shall slide in due time (Deut. 32:35 AV).

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3:14-15

Keep in mind that Paul has been speaking of men who have swerved from the truth (2:18). This is not something that has "just happened" but is the result of spiritual and moral failure. As a result these men have become taken up with themselves. They think themselves something when they are nothing (Gal. 6:3) and have become zealous in their exercise of influence, all of which leads to the further deception of themselves and of all coming under their influence. Over against this Timothy must stand firm. It is not a game he is called to play but it is spiritual warfare in which he must stand for truth and refute error. To do this he must know what he believes, why he believes it, on what ground he bases his belief and from whom he has learned it. He has seen incarnate truth in the lives of his own mother, grandmother, in Paul and his fellow apostles. But Timothy's sure ground and confidence is not the experience of godly men and women but the Scriptures and the God of the Scriptures. From natural childhood under the instruction of his mother and from spiritual childhood under his father in the faith, Timothy had been grounded in Scripture truth. This is preparation indeed for the ministry, but care must be taken as to the teachers we listen to. Not all who sound evangelical are in fact spiritually healthy, and one of the Devil's great techniques is to get us moved away from God's truth, and this he often accomplishes by means of suspect teachers who, in Christ's name, seem to be presenting something "new" but still "biblical" because it is couched in biblical language. We must not accept at random and at face value all that is presented to us. Put the teachers to the test, but don't feel obliged to sit in judgment on your own minister. Do preachers speak as the Scriptures speak? This is the test (Isa. 8:20 AV). One practical point in our generation when so much literature is finding its way into our homes is to look for a name to identify clearly who is issuing the material. If the name is not clear, the distributors have something to hide and their motives are not pure.

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3:14-15

Take time today to remind ourselves of the importance and function of the Scriptures and to realise that we have good grounds for having a great trust in them. In referring to the people who had been instrumental in Timothy's instruction and conversion there is no suggestion that Paul (who, of course, spoke as an apostle and therefore with God-given authority) was in any way exalting tradition to a place equal with Scripture. Men and women may be avenues and instruments of instruction, but they are never *sources* of truth or authority. These belong to God alone, who has spoken for man's salvation and whose Word is given in Holy Scripture. Teachers as well as listeners must be in submission to the Word. The worthy tradition in which we have been brought up insists that nothing in the life of the church must be allowed to get in the way of or cloud the good word of God. If this principle was always followed there would be less irrelevance in much of modern evangelism, and the "entertainment" element in Christian activity would be reduced to seemly proportion. Paul also emphasises here the need for the instruction of children to be firmly and comprehensively scriptural and all "methods" of children's work must be tested in this light. If we bring up our children with a minimal knowledge of the Bible then we are doing despite to the church of the future. Why do so many adult believers have to confess that they do not know their Bibles as they should? It is because they have left the learning of them too late. The scriptures are able, that is they are with power, to make us wise unto salvation and to instruct us in salvation, which salvation becomes ours only through faith in Christ.

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3:16-17

The theme is the Bible. When Paul used the phrase "Holy Scriptures" ("sacred writings" RSV) (15) he may possibly have been referring to the Old Testament, for these were the Scriptures that were in existence when Timothy was a child. It is to be noted that Paul says these Scriptures are with power for salvation because, after all, the message of the Old Testament is Christ the Saviour, the Lamb of God (Lk. 24: 25-27, 44-47). But the

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reading of Scripture, the hearing of it and the preaching of it, are not effective for salvation unless faith is in operation (Heb. 4:2). Scripture and its formulae are not charms or magical incantations or spells, and too much preaching is simply the uttering of propositional Gospel information. That is not the same as holding forth the word of life (Phil. 2:16 AV). At the same time we must remember and be persuaded that *all* Scripture, a phrase used to include the New Testament with the Old, is God-given and consequently is with power. The "power" of the Word in preaching is not given to it by the preacher's power, passion and eloquence. Indeed human eloquence and cleverness in preaching can deprive the Word of its effective power (1 Cor. 1:17). That is a solemn warning to all who are called to handle the Word. God's Word is God breathed, that is breathed out by God rather than having something breathed into it. It is a God-given Word in God given words and consequently carries its own inspiration, authority and power. It is a Word which, when sent forth, will not return empty (Isa. 55:11). It is a Word which works to glorious purpose for men's salvation (1 Thess. 2:13 .00.). It is the instrument by which faith is born (Rom. 10:17) and it is the ordained means whereby God is pleased to work His purposes of salvation (1 Cor. 1:21). To be involved with this Word on the Lord's Day is a thrill indeed, for you never quite know what God is doing.

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3:16-17

These are days in which even "evangelicals" are beginning to hold unorthodox views of the inspiration, infallibility and authority of Scripture, and even though daily notes are not the place for giving detailed theological papers on the subject, we do spend several days considering these very important verses. We must hold to the translation in the RSV and AV which make it plain that all Scripture is given by God and is inspired. Some translations put a comma after the words "scripture" and "God", but this has the same effect as translations which say "Every Scripture which is God breathed is profitable". Such translations imply that there are scriptures which are in the Bible which are not to be thought of as inspired. This has led some to say that the Bible *contains* the Word of God, in the sense that somewhere within all the material and framework of the Bible there is to be found, if we look hard enough, the Word of God. The implication is that there is much in the Bible that is not really necessary and this leads to the rejection of many parts of it. This could be likened to the analogy of the baby in the bath water. We agree that the baby is the important thing! But if anything happens to the bath (cradle), if it gets rotten and defective, then the baby falls out and gets damaged beyond remedy. God did not just give the "message" but also the "container" so that we have the Word of God in the words God ordained for it. In this way God's Word was spoken, recorded and preserved for the generations to come. Certainly God used human instruments as Peter says (2 Pet. 1:21; cf. AV) and we think of this tomorrow.

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3:16-17

When God gave His Word He did not simply give basic religious ideas and then leave men to work them out as best they could. That would lead to confusion and contradiction. But when God spoke through men and caused the Word to be written down He did not in any way over-rule the will, or activity of the men He used. Compare the activity of God in giving the Scriptures with His activity in the incarnation (Lk. 1:35). Mary was a true mother like any other, the Holy Spirit was the divine agent of life, and that which was brought forth was the Son of God, the Word made flesh. In the same way the writers of Scripture were real men with authentic personalities which were not denied or blotted out in their writing. The active agent was God the Holy Spirit and the product was the word of God. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, breathed out by Him in clear and definite terms and purpose. The narratives, prophecies, history, ideas, imagery, words, including the words of bad men and devils, are all such as God saw fit to be there, so that His Word to men might be communicated, be understood, and stand for ever to make men wise unto salvation. Just as Christ is both divine and human, so is the Bible. You do not say (although heretics both ancient and modern do say) that sometimes Jesus is God and sometimes man. Some say He is not God at all, for example, Unitarians and also heretics even in Trinitarian denominations. Neither do you say that Jesus is half God and half man, for that would mean He is neither. He is "God-man", with no confusion or contradiction. So is the Bible the Word of God and the words of men. They are one. With a disc or a tape you cannot say that part is voice and that part is simply plastic. They cannot be separated.

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3:16-17

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is the Word of God the supreme rule of faith and life. As the Catechism says, "The scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man." The Word of God stands true even when no-one believes it. It is important to state this because there are those who say that the Bible is the Word of God when it speaks to you personally. This is not a tenable position for it means that at times the Bible just is not the Word of God at all, because people will say, "that didn't mean a thing to me; it said nothing to me". Again people say that it is Christ who is the Word of God and not a book. But all we know of Christ is recorded in the Scriptures. (Jesus loves me! This I know, For the Bible tells me so".) Then people say that all we need is the four gospels. But this is not tenable according to Jesus' own words in Luke 24:27 and 44. There He makes it plain that the whole of the Old Testament testifies to Himself in terms of His death and resurrection for the salvation of sinners. In the Old Testament Christ is promised and prepared for; in the Gospels He is presented; in the Epistles He is expounded, explained and applied. All Scripture holds together in Christ without contradiction. Everything begins with the God who speaks in order to reveal Himself so that people might know Him. God spoke (Heb. 1:1-2) but the transmission of the spoken word is a hazardous business. The only safe thing to do is to write it down. This is exactly what God caused to happen. The Bible is the record of the way that God chose to give His revelation to men and to guarantee its transmission to future generations.

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3:16-17

The Bible must be our ministry as it was in the apostolic church (Acts 13:44; 17:2-3; 18: 11). The cry of people is, "How can we understand if no one explains it?" (Acts. 8: 31). And it must be a *whole* Bible we preach and deal with, if we are to deal with a *whole* Christ (Acts 20:20, 27). We are not called to defend the Bible, for it can look after itself if it is let loose among men. We are to preach the Bible, not apologise for it. We may legitimately recognise that there are difficulties in translation, in the matter of dates and numbers, and in reconciling different accounts of the same events. We must certainly admit that there are parts of the Bible we do not understand and cannot reconcile with our present level of knowledge and understanding. But this does not in any way invalidate our attitude with regard to the full inspiration and final authority of Scripture. It is God's Word, which will never let us down. It is profitable for teaching, so that we learn Christ. It is essential for reproof, that is for refuting error and for increasing conviction. We need it for correction, setting us right and getting us back on course. It is the thing needed for training in right living and godly discipline. And the issue of it is the production of men and women who are complete, integrated and grown-up humanly and spiritually, fitted and prepared for all the good service on many levels which God has prepared for us (Eph. 2:10).

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3:16-17

In considering this theme of Scripture we look finally at some passages which indicate the many and varied blessings that the good word of God brings to our lives. It is by the word of God that we are born again and grow in our new Christ-life (1 Pet. 1:23-2:3). The Word has a washing and cleansing effect which reaches down into the subconscious life (Eph. 5:26). The word of the Lord revives, rejoices and enlightens the whole of life (Ps. 19:7-14) and it also exerts a restraining influence upon our actions. The Word of God is the sword or instrument of the Holy Spirit in His work as executor of the purposes of God (Eph. 6:17). It is living, life-giving and powerful (Heb. 4:12). It is not bound or restricted in its working (2 Tim. 2:9). Neither can it fail in its God-ordained function (Isa. 55:11). It was by the word of the Lord that the heavens were made and by that same word they are preserved (2 Pet. 3:5). An interesting translation of Jeremiah 1:12 reads as God saying to a young minister just starting his ministry: "I am watching over my word to perform it". What an encouragement in all our witnessing and preaching.

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4:1-2

Here is the young minister being given his charge before God. It follows on directly from what has been said about the authority and sufficiency of Scripture and it is spoken in the context of dangerous and demanding days for the church and its witness. It will be followed by a warning about coming days of apostasy and refusal of sound doctrine, and all this emphasises the urgency of the situation. This is not a time to be introspective and obsessive about church structures. The days fly past with such swiftness, and the day of redemption and judgment comes so near (Rom. 13:11-14) that there is but one priority. Preach the Word and let people hear it clearly and with gracious conviction. It is against this solemn yet exciting background of eternity that Paul speaks to Timothy words that simply express his own attitude to his whole life of ministry, now practically ended. "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel," (1 Cor. 9:16 AV). He was answerable to God. He was also proud of the gospel and saw no reason to be otherwise (Rom. 1:16). He never moved from this costly stance, when he preached in Corinth being determined to know nothing among them but Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:1-5). Nor did he ever forget that in the end he would be answerable at the judgment-seat of Christ for his whole life of ministry. Think of his final word to the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20:17-32 and let solemn grace move our hearts to fresh dedication. At the same time do not fail to see and sense the encouragement to all the servants of God in the thought of Christ's appearing and His kingdom. "This day the noise of battle, the next the victor's song." Never forget that the victory is ours now. The issues are not in doubt.

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4:1-2

Look at the detail of this apostolic injunction. Set in the context of God's judgment on the one hand and the increasing apostasy of men on the other, Timothy is charged, as his first priority, to preach or herald the Word, sounding it forth, explaining, and applying the message, and always dealing with it as God's own truth. We are not called to defend the Word or make excuses for it when it speaks with sweeping and disturbing authority. It is God's Word, carrying its own authority and dynamic, and it is God who sends it out through the instrumentality of those whom He has called to do this work. But if the preacher ever loses his sense of calling, or his conviction about his message, or his sense of privilege as well as responsibility in the service of the gospel, he will never constrain people to listen. He must be urgent, but not with false emotional intensity which he does not feel in any authentic way. Rather he must be instant, at hand, ready for duty, alive to grasp every opportunity whether the time seems opportune or not. But this does not mean that kind of brash evangelicalism that has no sense of propriety or seemliness and is simply a manifestation of bad manners. We must never confuse witnessing with exhibitionism and we must recognise that some preaching is merely performance. In all our dealings with what belongs to God we must see to it that any offence caused is in fact the "offence of the Cross" and not offence, reaction or stumbling caused by our own graceless personalities, attitudes or actions. This is very important in an age when the spirit of society is one of unbelief that tends to resent advice let alone interference.

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4:1-2

Preaching is a dangerous business, as becomes clear when you consider the aspects of it urged upon Timothy. He is to preach forth the Word with instant urgency in order to accomplish certain objectives. He is to convince or convict, and this is an integral part of the work of God's Word. It must often hurt before it can heal, uncovering the wound of sin and persuading the sinner of the seriousness of his condition. This is, of course, the work of the Holy Spirit and He alone can do it (John 16: 7-11). The objective is to convince and so to convict, and in that conviction to lead to confession and to the sinner casting himself on Christ. It is a saving word we proclaim, even though we recognise that often its work will be one of condemnation. In dealing with sinful wrongdoers, whether or not they make a profession of faith, another part of the work of true ministry is to rebuke, reprimand or censure when it is necessary. There must be no toning down of the truth, and this is a hard business especially when dealing with people we like and love. The call to exhort includes the idea of encouragement, comfort and counsel, for the Greek word used gives us the word "paraclete" which signifies one called alongside to help. All these essential aspects of true preaching have to be carried out with unfailing patience (longsuffering), together with teaching. The manner of the preacher must be patient in the extreme,

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which is never easy in the face of dogged unbelief and contemptuous indifference. But the preacher, if he is to present Christ truly, must be slow to get angry (2 Cor. 6:3-10; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12-13; 1 Thess. 5:12-15). That is the only attitude of spirit in which a man will be apt to teach (2. Tim. 2:24-25). But note that the patience and the teaching go together. "To rebuke without instruction is to leave the root cause of error untouched." (Guthrie)

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4:3-4

Consider well how these verses describe the scene of our own generation and consider the sobering prospect of living in a society from which the last remnants of Christian influence have disappeared. We may not have reached that stage yet but without doubt the knowledge of Christian truth is disappearing rapidly, and when that happens deeper desolation and deprivation follow relentlessly. Think of Amos' words about a famine of the Word (Amos 8:11-14) and how that issues in many of the younger generation turning to the occult in a search for the "spiritual" element in life. Think of the words in Jer. 5:30-31 which describe the religious life of the nation governed by a "false word:" from God and note God's comment that *His* people are happy to have it so. Read in Ezek. 33:30-33 of a situation in which the people of God like to listen to good sermons, just as they like to listen to good music and ballads. They are interested but have no thought of allowing their lives to be changed by the truth so presented. Is this not the situation we live in, when novelty is all the rage? If a thing is "different" is it not hailed as a "new thing" from God and adulated until the next new thing comes along? This is the situation Paul met in the decaying intellectualism of Athens in Acts. 17:23 and it demonstrated the tragic lostness of a people, a whole generation who worshipped an unknown God. Let us take the warning to heart. In our day, when "experience" has taken precedence over doctrine, and pleasure has displaced duty, we are indeed in danger of losing all true knowledge of God. If this be so then those who are disturbed by it had better start praying in earnest for the young people growing up into darkness.

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4:3-4

In all the history of the church truth has always been opposed and withstood, but this neither deters nor depresses the believer because it is Christ who builds His church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail (Matt. 16:18). It is Hell which is on the defensive not the church! But truth is also counterfeited and this is one of the Devil's strong and successful weapons, for people are willfully deceived into following what seems to be spiritual without discerning the true nature or inspiration or end of what they are following. The world of entertainment rightly refers to "pop idols" and the world of religion is infected, not least in the fact that all too often people look for a "personality" figure who will be a "draw", i.e. an attraction to bring the people in. This means simply that the appeal is being made to what people like to see, hear and experience. It is of great significance that at the same time as many rather dubious methods of evangelism are becoming fashionable the interest in biblical doctrine, discipline and practice is becoming less, while the interest in prayer meetings is generally minimal. Little wonder certain sections of the evangelical church confess they are facing a crisis of identity. If once the church loses its distinctive position in matters of faith and life as they are made plain by the inspiration and authority of Scripture, then the church is lost indeed. Why should the Devil use the gross and ugly to sidetrack the church when he can use things that *seem* to be spiritual? The sad thing is that so often the church does riot seem to be aware that gospel truth has been left behind. The story of Samson in Judges 16:20 deserves much attention lest we be distracted into mere organisation forgetting fundamental issues.

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4:5

Just as there are always people who want their "ears tickled", so there are always teachers who are willing to do the tickling, not least to gain acceptability or even fame. It is a great snare and costly to keep clear of it. Sometimes it is the slights of men that become fierce barbs in the preacher's feelings and sometimes it is the deep, inward weariness (2 Cor. 11:28-29) that breaks a man down. No one knew this better than Paul, as the rest of this chapter makes plain, and he was fully aware of what Timothy would have to face if he was going to be faithful. Paul did not lack compassion, but this was a time for virile challenge and Paul addressed the young man with words calculated to bring out the best in him. It is as if Paul said, "Whatever you see others doing,

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however famous or adulated they may be, see to it that you stand your ground." This final exhortation is the climax of several similar phrases. Fan the flame (1:6), do not be ashamed (1:8), follow the pattern (1:13), be strong (2:1), and take your share of suffering (2:3), do your best (2:15), shun youthful passions (2:22), aim at righteousness and be ready for trouble (3:1), keep on going on (3:14), and stand steady endure work accomplish your ministry (4:5). Of course it is only those who know their God who are able to be strong, to stand firm and get on with the job (Dan. 11:32). There is both release of spirit and fulfilment in simply recognising that God has given you a job to do and then being determined to get on and do it. We need to learn the magnificently humble determination of Nehemiah, when he said he was doing a great work and refused to be distracted (Neh. 6:2-3).

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4:5

The exhortation to keep your head (be steady RSV) is translated in the AV "Be sober", and the word "enjoins moral alertness or coolness and presence of mind" (Guthrie). This thought of being in one's right mind and in calm control of both thought and action is emphasised in many places, e.g. Mk. 5:15; 2 Cor. 5:13; Rom. 12:3; 1 Thess. 5:6,8; 1 Pet. 4:7. "There are dangers to spiritual well-being in intemperance, uncontrolled excitement or frenzy, or conceit. This sinful and self-indulgent world is not the place to lose one's mental or moral balance. Those who would be ready for Christ's appearing must keep their head and conscience: clear" (Stibbs on 1 Pet. 4:7). The sober man is calm and steady and is not over-swayed either by the exciting or the sentimental. Paul calls Timothy to this sane and temperate attitude to all things, whether it be the suffering he meets or the work he is privileged to do. He must guard his reactions, remembering that the ministry is both a lonely and a vulnerable place. The Devil makes great capital out of our fluctuating emotions, which he exaggerates and manipulates, and it is in this realm that he can exercise a dragging effect on all our service. Of course all Paul is saying assumes that the man in the ministry has a clear conviction as to what he is supposed to be doing, and Paul has dealt with that in 2:1-2. It is a two-fold work. It is the work of the evangel in the presenting, heralding the whole counsel of God in systematic scriptural ways (Acts 20:20, 27), holding back nothing. And at the same time it is the work of building churches that will stand in and by the truth of God, no matter what pressures come in a dangerous and apostate generation. But there is another great reason why the young man must take a firm grip on himself and his work and that is tomorrow's theme.

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4:6

It is a solemn day for the church and the nation when its wise, experienced, spiritual teachers of the Word come to the end of their days. It is then that many people realise just how much they have leaned on a man and how much they have been carried by him. But this is not Paul's emphasis. He is handing over the leadership and stewardship of the good work of God to the man he has trained and prepared. Paul is doing what he counselled Timothy to do in 2:1-2, but his thoughts are not about his own past ministry, nor about the present difficulties, nor the pressures that will surely come on Timothy and all like him. Conscious that his time on earth is strictly limited, he looks up into the face of the God to whom he must soon give account of his life-long stewardship. He is not afraid to go, nor is he unwilling. Nor is he over anxious about the work of God, possibly because he is persuaded that Timothy is both ready and capable to take up the task, but basically because the work is in God's mighty hand, and God does not fail. Perhaps what we have to do in today's reading is to ask all those who are younger in years if they are in fact ready to step forward into the kind of responsible service that Paul has taught in words and exemplified in life. In whatever congregation you are committed to, at home or abroad (and you should be committed to *one specific place* if you are to grow in grace and usefulness), if the senior men and women were taken away soon, could you and would you take over leadership and exercise it in such a way that the flock of God would be safe, well cared for and surely taught and led? We should always order our lives in the light of the next ten or twenty years, for it may take that length of time for God to prepare us for the significant stage of our life and service. Be ready, and be willing to be made ready.

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4:6

Here are the calm, clear-eyed observations of a Christian man who knows he is dying. He does not have to make any radical changes in his way of life or his attitudes. He has lived looking unto Jesus (Heb. 12:1-4; Phil. 3:7ff) and he dies looking unto Jesus. In Phil. 2:17 Paul had looked squarely at the possibility of a martyr's death but here it is already in the process of happening and there is to be no reversal. He is on the point of being "poured out as an offering", and the language refers to the Old Testament sacrifices when the drink offering was poured out on the altar as the last act in the sacrifice (Num. 28:7). The drink offering was a sweet savour unto the Lord (Num. 15:7) and, just as Paul's whole life had been a sacrifice to the Lord (Rom. 12:1-2; Phil. 1:20-21; Gal. 6:14), so he desires that his dying and his death will be worthy of the Lord, a true offering and a fragrant sacrifice so that his Lord will indeed see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied (Isa. 53:11). But Paul goes on to speak of his death as a departure rather than a terminus, for the life that is his in Christ is eternal life that has no ending. Paul is persuaded, as Peter was, about the inheritance that is reserved in Heaven (1 Pet. 1: 3-5). He is also fully assured about the many mansions Jesus spoke of in John 14:2 AV and, as Jesus said, your heart will always be where your treasure is (Matt. 6:19-21). For Paul, life was Christ and death could only be gain. We do not say for a moment that the business of dying was pleasant for Paul but there is a quietness of spirit here that is wonderfully serene. *Dying* may be a ghastly business but *death* has lost its sting and even in the darkened valley the trusting believer is not alone (Ps. 23: 4).

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4:6-7

The essential note here is not sunset but sunrise. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:6-7). Paul speaks of his coming death as a departure, that is, leaving at the right time for a clear destination. This word "departure" has the significance of raising the anchor and loosening the ropes when the vessel is ready to sail and the tide is right. It is all very positive and purposeful and for Paul there is a note of triumph in it. "What might seem the end to Timothy appears to the apostle as a glorious new era when he will be released from all his present restrictions." (Guthrie) This is the emphasis in the Book of Revelation which speaks of God's servants serving Him and seeing Him face to face in life that is quite unclouded (Rev. 22:3-5). But as Paul's words go on, we see that there is nothing sentimental about his attitude, for he does not shrink from the fact that it is appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment (Heb. 9:27). He himself lived his life conscious that he must one day give account of his faithfulness or otherwise (1 Cor. 4:1-5), and it was this that kept him from being unduly influenced or distracted by men's criticisms. He lived unto God. This is what he now claims when he says he has fought the good fight. It was the fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12), in which he believed God (Acts 27:25) and set his eyes firmly on the unseen things of eternity (2 Cor. 4:16-18). The word "fight" has the note of agony in it, for it is hard, taxing, and relentless, whether it is thought of in terms of the athletic contest or the military campaign. Certainly for Paul it was no occasion for shadow-boxing (1 Cor. 9:24-27). He did not play at Christian soldiers.

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4:6-8

In v.7 Paul makes three glorious statements which summarise his whole Christian life. The good and noble fight he has fought right to the end, and it had been a fight all along the line, as God had said it would be at the time of his conversion (Acts 9:15,16). This description of his experiences is, of course, the assessment of faith, for worldly people would have described Paul's life as madness (Acts 26:24), sheer folly and totally undesirable. But the Christian's scale of values is quite different. When Paul says he has finished the race he is using this metaphor from the athletic arena in a specific way. The runner does not set the course of the race. It is done for him, marked out in detail of direction and duration, and Paul does not say anything about winning the race as if he was comparing himself favourably with others. He is simply stating that he has kept on going on until he has now reached the finishing line. What does it matter if he is tired or a bit out of breath and feeling certain things perhaps more keenly than is necessary? It had for Paul been a veritable obstacle race but nothing had deterred him. He had run looking away from circumstances unto Jesus and had always counselled others to do the same (Gal. 2:2; 5:7; Phil. 2:16; cf. Heb. 12:1-3). In the fight and in the race he had kept the faith. This could mean that he had kept faithful to his Lord, or that he had kept faithfully the gospel committed to his stewardship, or that he

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had maintained his personal trust in God, ever standing on His faithful promises. To change the figure of speech, he was a workman who had learned what God is like. And, having trusted God and proved Him faithful in all manner of experiences, he could well say to others, with quiet assurance, that his God would supply all their need on the scale of His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19). He had no hesitation in telling others of the peace of God which can keep the heart and mind (Phil. 4:6-7). What a testimony!

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4:6-8

Consider these words of William Hendriksen in his Commentary on Timothy: "When the apostle summarizes his life as a Christian under the symbolism of the 'grand fight' the underlying figure is probably a wrestling match, boxing-bout, or similar contest (see 1 Tim. 4:7b, 8; 6:12). The point of comparison is prodigious: exertion of energy against a very powerful foe. It had been a fight against Satan; against the principalities and powers, the world rulers of this darkness in the heavenlies; against Jewish and pagan vice and violence; against Judaism among the Galatians; against fanaticism among the Thessalonians; against contention, fornication, and litigation among the Corinthians; against incipient Gnosticism among the Ephesians and Colossians; against fightings without and fears within; and last but not least against the law of sin and death operating within his own heart." That is a tremendous statement summarising Paul's whole life of service and it is impossible here to give a list of all the references that spring to mind. Ephesians 6:10ff is the obvious passage. We could also think of Paul's description of one hard situation as a great door of opportunity with many adversaries (1 Cor. 16:9), or his description of his warfare with spiritual weapons pulling down strongholds (2 Cor. 10:4). The entire story in Acts of his missionary journeys, his imprisonments, his confrontations with church leaders and his defence of the gospel against all who would obscure it (Gal. 1:6-9) and his tireless labours testify to a grand fight indeed. We can but pray, "Lord, make me like that."

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4:8

Like his Lord before him and in company with the mighty men of faith in the Old Testament Paul had kept his eyes firmly on the joy and reward set before him (Heb. 12:1-2). This is not being mercenary or unworthy but simply being realistic. No one can work and war without a clear objective and it is when we lose the vision of what we are doing, why we are doing it and where we are going that we become weary, disillusioned, cynical and ineffective. How we need to tell ourselves in the midst of costly discipleship that it is not for nothing. Out of the travail of faithfulness there comes life born in others (John 12:24; Col. 1:24). Certainly it is by means of the furnace of affliction and the disciplines of experience that faith is forged and righteousness of character developed and matured. We become real people in Christ and this is blessing and liberation indeed. But Paul is speaking more objectively of the crown that is in fact the reward of righteousness and he says it is stored away safely for him. There is confidence in Paul but no presumption. He has lived the life of obedience and there is no reason why he should doubt the crown. Like his Master before him he has finished the work he was given to do and he has delighted in it (John 17:4; cf. Ps. 40:8). He held to the promise of the reward as others did also (Jas. 1:22; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Rev. 2:10). There is so much here to encourage us to hold fast and to go on, quite apart from the actual crown of reward. Paul was surely very aware that he had not been serving some far removed deity, some divine principle of righteousness, but a Master gloriously human and personally caring. Did he have in mind the words of Jesus, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," (Matt. 25:20, 21)?

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4:8

In all his life and work Paul constantly placed the realities of the world to come over against the pressures, demands and disappointments of this present world. His citizenship was in heaven (Phil. 3:20) and he looked for that city which had foundation (Heb. 11:10). "Henceforth" (AV and RSV but "now" in NIV) was a dynamic concept for him and it must be so for us. We must not become "worldly" Christians, for time and opportunity are slipping away speedily (Rom. 13: 11-14). And,

"The life above, when this is past,

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Is the ripe fruit of life below." (Bonar)

The idea of reward and loss in heaven as well as on earth is basic to Paul's attitude to life and service (1 Cor. 3: 10-15; 2 Cor. 5:6-10). To "receive the deeds done in the body" (AV) is quite a thought! But it is totally reasonable. Yes, the Lord knows our frame and remembers just how weak, frail and limited we are (Ps. 103:14). He will never snuff out the feeble spark or smash the tottering life (Isa. 42:3). He is a God of grace and salvation, tender and merciful.

"There is no place where earth's sorrows
Are more felt than up in heaven;
There is no place where earth's failings
Have such kindly judgment given" (Faber).

Paul would say "Amen" and "Hallelujah" to all of that and yet he insisted, without craven fear, that there *is* a day of accounting. He had never thought of himself as a free agent. He was a bond-slave of Jesus Christ, left in charge of the Master's affairs until He should return. Read the words of Jesus in Luke 19:11ff. Tomorrow we finish our study in this important verse.

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4:8

It is quite obvious that Paul was looking forward to, not dreading, the day of judgment and this signifies that the issue on that day is not the long list of every sin we have ever sinned. There is forgiveness with God and when the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin there comes into operation the glorious forgetfulness of God (Ps. 130:4; 1 John 1:9; Jer. 31:34). Paul spoke of the Lord, and that signified to him so much of sovereign grace and providence (Phil 2:9-11). He described Him as the righteous Judge, setting Him over against all the corrupt and compromised judges of the world under whose baneful and prejudiced influence the Christians were suffering. The day of crowning may be delayed but it will come and it will be pleasure and satisfaction for all involved, at least for all those who have loved Christ's appearing. This reference to the "appearing" of Christ, His epiphany or manifestation, has as much to do with His first coming as with His second coming in glory. It speaks of those who love the Lord and who are set on Him. Such will always have the forward look because they are increasingly aware that this world is not their home. To look for Christ's coming is not an emotional escapism. It is far too realistic for that, as the words in Rev. 22:3-21 make plain. What Paul is emphasising to Timothy and to all the servants of the Lord is that it is the disposition of the heart and life that is in view here in relation to the crown of righteousness. Let no one be tormented by their sins and failures. Go to Jesus and to the fountain opened for sin and wash and be clean (Zech. 13:1). Perhaps the Psalmist (whose words Paul would know and love) states it best when he says, "My heart is fixed," (Ps. 57:7 AV). Where the heart is the life goes, and that kind of life gets the crown. But what will we do with the crown? Think of Wesley's words:

"Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love and praise."

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4:9-10

These verses are very personal and tell us a great deal about the humanity of Paul, and yet they are an integral part of the spiritual message of the epistle. The great man was lonely, and without hesitation he asked for Timothy to come to him as soon as possible. He was not unreasonable in his request, and in v.21 pleaded for him to come before winter. How long Paul expected to have before his execution we cannot say but it would take time for Timothy to get the letter and then to travel from Ephesus to Rome. Paul's request would mean Timothy being away from his own work for a spell of months and therefore we may assume that Paul had more extensive reasons for asking him to come than just for the strength of his fellowship. At the same time the following verses make plain that Paul was very conscious at this time of those who were leaving him, some because of defection and some to other work. The departure of Demas was a sore blow and Paul seemed to be making a clear comparison between those who love Christ's appearing (8) and Demas who had switched his affections to this present world. Some commentators suggest Demas had defected from Paul in a personal sense,

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possibly feeling the apostle's demands and standards were too high, rather than having defected from the church. We do not know why Demas went to Thessalonica rather than stay at Rome. Did he feel it too dangerous to stand for Christ where it might cost his reputation (because of his identification with Paul) or even his life? That Demas had been a close associate in the work, as close as Luke, is evident from Col. 4:14 and Philemon 23-24. Some suggest Demas had never been a true believer and refer to Matt. 7:22-23. In 1 John 2:15-17 we are told that those who love the world are not true believers at all. It is not for us to judge Demas. The righteous Judge tries all hearts.

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4:10b-12

We have no knowledge of Crescens except this mention here. He takes his place among the unknown servants of the gospel, unknown save to their own generation. How many will there be in Heaven who owe their conversion to this man? Titus is a well known and trusted colleague of Paul. In Titus 3:12 Paul makes arrangements for both himself and Titus to travel some considerable distance so that the two of them could spend the winter together, no doubt planning future missionary strategy. Paul was only too glad to consult and share with men who had, over a long spell, proved faithful to the Lord and to himself. Titus, a Gentile, is first heard of in Gal. 2:1-3 accompanying Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem in the test case as to whether or not circumcision was to be made necessary for Gentile converts. Later he represented Paul in Corinth, particularly in the matter of ingathering of money (2 Cor. 8:6, 10, 16) and this involved more than one visit to that city. He seems to have had a particular care for and capacity to deal with the wilful and the quarrelsome Corinthian believers and he played a great part in sorting out and calming the situation of tension between Paul and that congregation. He was a strong character (2 Cor. 7:15), and from 2 Cor. 2:9, 12-13, together with 2 Cor. 7:5-7, 13-14, it appears that Titus had carried the strong letter of discipline to the church at Corinth and had dealt personally with the ensuing tension. In 2 Cor. 8:16-17, 23 we are told that Titus carried the second letter from Paul to the Corinthians. He was a man held dearly by Paul and trusted with spiritual work in Crete, as Titus 1:4-5 makes plain. When he was relieved in Crete (Tit. 3:12) he joined Paul in Nicopolis, but now in today's verses we are told he was again away on the Lord's business. What a man he must have been and how Paul missed him in these last days of his life. But the work had claimed him, and for the work's sake Paul surrendered the blessing of Titus' company and strength.

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4:10b-12

This passage from Hendriksen's commentary says all we need about Luke. "'Luke is the only one with me.' The author of the third Gospel was a remarkable person. He was the 'beloved physician' (Col. 4:14), always loyal to Paul, to the gospel, to the Lord. Frequently he had been Paul's companion in travel, as is indicated by the 'we' sections in Acts (16:10-17; 20:6-16; 21: 27; 28). He had been with Paul on the second missionary journey, at Troas and at Philippi. He had evidently been left behind at the latter place (Acts 16:17-19). Towards the close of the third tour he seems again to have joined Paul at Philippi (Acts 20:60), and he accompanied him to Jerusalem. For a while we do not see him. But suddenly he reappears, for he is in Paul's company on the long and dangerous sea journey from Palestine to Rome (Acts 27). He is with the apostle during both the first and the second Roman imprisonments (Col. 4:14; Philemon 24; 2 Tim. 4:11). Paul needed a doctor and a friend. Luke was both and directly or indirectly may also have served in the capacity of Paul's secretary. Luke and Paul had much in common. Both were educated men, men of culture. Both were big-hearted, broad-spirited, sympathetic. Above all, both were believers and missionaries." There is ground for believing that for the fateful journey to Rome (Acts 27) Luke signed on to the crew as Paul's personal servant. Consequently he accepted the appropriate living and working conditions simply in order to be by the side of this man with whom he had such fellowship in the service of Christ. They strengthened each other in the Lord (1 Sam. 23:16).

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4:11

As he journeyed to meet Paul, Timothy is told to pick up Mark and bring him to the apostle in Rome because he had proved very useful for ministry, not so much personal ministrations to Paul but the work of the ministry in

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the service of Christ's kingdom. Mark's home was a significant one in Jerusalem. He was with Paul on his early missionary work, but for unknown reasons he returned home in the middle of a missionary trip (Acts 13:13). This resulted in Paul refusing to have him on a later trip and this led to the split between Paul and Barnabas, who was Mark's uncle (Acts 15:36-40). There must have been repentance and reconciliation for we later find Mark in Paul's company during the apostle's early imprisonment in Rome (Col. 4:10; Philemon 24) and this is a great comfort to all who have failed and fallen. Discipline there must be, but permanent disqualification need not follow. Indeed Mark's later service seems to have been on a richer and deeper level than at the beginning. Mark was with Peter in Rome (1 Pet. 5:13) and it seems that Peter was one of Mark's main sources of information in the writing of his gospel. This young man had indeed matured and had proved himself in the service of Christ. Who then would be a better and more useful man to have in Rome at a time of crisis? Mark knew Rome and was known there. Here is another example of all things working together for good. Never underestimate God in His providential dealings with us. He is preparing us for future service in situations yet unknown to us. We must trust Him and learn all we can so that when the time comes we will be ready and willing. What would our reaction be if we were summoned, as Mark was, to drop everything and go to Rome? When believers walk with God there is unanimity with regard to guidance, and when that is not present it is time to pray and to be cautious.

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4:12

There is so much detail and significance in these brief mentions of people and places that we must not hurry over them. Hendriksen makes the comment that even in jail Paul was active as the great superintendent of missions. His knowledge of people and places was astonishing and his decisive administration is wonderful to see. Paul knew his men, no doubt because in the context of service they had allowed themselves to be known and had not been reticent or secretive. This man Tychicus was possibly a citizen of Ephesus and was a trusted associate. Paul makes references to him e.g. Acts 20:1-4; Col. 4:7-9; Eph. 6:21-22. Tychicus was the messenger who carried the letters to Colosse and Ephesus and possibly this letter to Timothy. The terms Paul uses to speak of this man signify the closeness of the fellowship between them and we must think of Paul's gratitude to God for such men in whom he could confide. Tychicus could also be relied on wherever he went to give a true and loyal account of how things were with Paul, and this is important. It is so easy by innuendo, by reticence or by some inflexion of voice to sow seeds of uncertainty or to set in motion disaffection from God's servant and so create a disposition which is an evil distraction from the work of God. The loyalty which Paul called forth from his colleagues was not just a personal loyalty, although that is a good thing and pleasing to God who has called and appointed His men to lead the work, it is loyalty to the work and to the basic, biblical and spiritual principles on which the work was founded and by which it had developed and come to its present condition of integrity and blessing. This is something that needs to be remembered by those, of whatever age group, who take it upon themselves to pronounce about the changes they would like to see taking place. Some of these people need to be challenged to go out and establish a spiritual work of their own, if they are in fact capable of doing so. Tychicus was a man who could be trusted to the hilt, because he had proved himself.

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4:13

Paul was a spiritual giant but he was in no sense super-human. Nor was he foolish enough to take liberties with his health or to expose himself to unnecessary privation. In a cold, damp prison with winter approaching (21) he feels the need of his heavy-weight cloak, blanket or poncho which had been left behind on a recent visit to Troas. Either Paul was forgetful (what a comfort to some of us!) or on the journey in question he had decided that the heavy things like the cloak and the books could be left to be collected later. Perhaps he had expected to be back at Troas within days but it had not turned out that way. Life, after all, is very uncertain and we do not know what a day may bring (Jas. 4:13-15). Paul knew that if he were going to be fit to face the demands of spiritual crises when they came he must be in health physically, and here is a lesson for us all with regard to the ordering of our lives. We must see to it as a spiritual duty to have right amounts of sleep and relaxation and to be wise and humble enough to contract out of even pressing spiritual duties *at times* in order to rest. This is what Jesus commanded His disciples to do (Mk. 6:31). We must see that our bodies have a right diet of food

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and our minds likewise must be fed, stimulated and sanctified by the right kind of reading. What about the cloak? Had Paul only one such garment or had he not the money to buy another? Had no one a spare one or were the Christians all in possession of only one such garment? Paul would not want to be warm at another's discomfort. Did they all take very literally Jesus words about cloaks (Matt. 5:40; Matt. 10:10)? Perhaps the believers in Rome were all too spiritual in their concern for Paul and thought exclusively in terms of prayer when in fact an overcoat was needed.

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4:13

Take time to consider Paul's interest in and desire for these books and parchments, whatever they were. It seems safe to assume that Paul would have always carried with him the Old Testament Scriptures, whatever else there was room for in his luggage. Was he referring here to copies of his epistles sent to various churches, private letters of counsel such as we have from saints like Samuel Rutherford or Murray McCheyne, or the detailed diaries of his journeys with notes and personal comments on a multitude of issues? We cannot really say what they were, but obviously Paul counted them very important even at this late stage in his life and he wanted to read them. This gives some indication of the priorities and the heart disposition of this man of God as he neared death. We do well to consider what we would call for in similar circumstances. We would very possibly want the things which we now consider to be the real priorities of life. A sudden and rather desperate desire for our Bibles and prayer when crisis comes is not a healthy sign. It is interesting that as late as this in his life of service, and in such adverse circumstances, Paul was still wanting to read and learn. He was not trying to re-live or recapture the past, much as he valued all the experiences that had made life what it was, but looking ahead, preparing himself for what was to come, and ever seeking new understanding and fresh blessing from what he was reading. There is a suggestion that some of the parchments were the early written gospels telling the story of Jesus. How important it is to have our minds and hearts stored up with what is good (Phil. 4:8).

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4:14-15

The reference to Alexander leads on to Paul's words about his trial and his examination before the magistrates. It may be that he is recalling some earlier confrontation with the authorities in which this man had spoken against him falsely. Alexander had professed Christ and had been involved in Christian activity but then had (for reasons known only to himself) carried on open warfare against the apostle. Possibly he was the kind of man who insisted that he stood by the faith and that it was just the wrongness, the limitations, the authority and leadership of Paul and his personal faults that he objected to. Never be taken in by this kind of thing. Look at the fruits of Paul and of Alexander and judge who walked with Christ. By their fruits you know them (Matt. 7:15-20). Of course, no work of God will proceed without enmity and the sorest thrusts will come from those inside the professing church. Our Lord knew plenty about wounds among friends (Zech. 13:6). The Judas who kissed him publicly was a friend (Matt. 26:50) and he had already done the hellish deed of betrayal. People called Jesus the Devil (John 8:49-52) and Paul was slandered more than most (2 Cor. 10:10), especially by the Corinthian Christians who considered themselves a cut above the rest of the Christians in terms of spiritual gifts. Wherever Christ is at work there will be a personal representative of the Accuser, Slanderer, Liar and Persecutor who will set himself or herself against the work in the person of its leader. There is more to be said about this tomorrow but here we must remember Jesus' words about the blessedness of those who are spoken against for the gospel's sake (Matt. 5:11-12).

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4:14-15

It is not possible to identify this Alexander with the man in 1 Tim. 1:20 or in Acts 19:33-34. The first seems to have been in doctrinal error and dealt with already and the second could only be this Alexander if we think of him as harbouring a grudge against Paul for the humiliation received in that incident years ago. In today's verses Paul seems to be referring to one specific incident when Alexander took up a position of speaking in deliberate opposition to Paul, and doing so with dishonesty. If this be so, then the man committed perjury and was believed and caused Paul much harm. There is a suggestion that the incident was a recent one and in naming

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him and his occupation Paul was making it clear the man was still around, and still accepted by many as a good and spiritual man, and still quite unrepentant about what he had done. Paul warned Timothy against Alexander as a man not to be trusted, and stated quite simply that the Lord would deal with him in His own good time. Read Isaiah 54:17. Touch not the Lord's anointed and do His prophets no harm (1 Chron. 16:22 AV). But would not Alexander claim the protection of God? Yes! Let God be judge. God deals with His servants and His ways are effective. He deals also with His enemies who are His servants' detractors, and in this also His ways are effective. Sometimes God's servants need to be told by God that men's quarrels are with Him not them (Exod. 16:7). It was a wise man indeed who counselled others to be careful lest they be found fighting against God (Acts.5:33-39).

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4:14-15

It is good for us to consider carefully whether our contribution to the work of God is positive or negative, healthful or destructive. People like to have influence over others and some, like Alexander, are well placed for such activity. Imagine the coppersmith with his customers coming and going day by day. What an arena for gossip that could become and what a cave of Adullam (1 Sam. 22:1, 2) it could be for the discontented, especially if they felt sure that Alexander would only be too willing to listen to the niggling complaints. It can be quite revealing whom we go to with our stories and our pleas for help. Too often what we want is not help but simply someone to take our side. The Book of Proverbs says searching things about our tongues and conversation, pointing out that our speech not only expresses and exposes us for what we are but also does something to us, making us a certain kind of person. Consider well Prov. 4:23, 24; Ps. 141:3, 4; Eph. 5:4; Jas. 3:1-12. If our hearts become spiritually sick all kinds of evil will flow from us and the infection might well cause a plague among the people of God (Heb.12: 15). A root of bitterness is a hellish thing and a difficult thing to get rid of. But note that Paul is not dealing with this matter simply on the basis of a personal insult and slander. That has to be accepted as part of the on-going hazard of being a servant of the gospel. He states clearly that Alexander resisted his words, his ministry, the pattern and progress of the work. Perhaps he felt entitled as a Christian of some years to state his opinion, but if in doing so he set himself over against the man God had appointed to lead the work, then he was claiming that Paul was misguided and that he was leading the church in a wrong direction. This was the issue. It usually is, and it needs to be stated.

4:16

The reference here is to the preliminary investigation carried out by law officers in preparation for the formal trial which would come later. Something of the pattern of events will be clear if we read Acts 24:1-27. There would be the accusers, and Paul would be allowed to speak on various occasions, no doubt taking opportunity to testify to Christ and the gospel. When this actually took place in Rome not one single Christian *who had the opportunity to do so* was in fact prepared to be present and to speak up for Paul. He stood alone. It may have been that the local believers felt they knew too little about Paul's missionary journeys to give exact, personal testimony, or it may have been that Paul's companions were over-awed by the official procedures of Roman law. But at the same time someone could have been there. Hurt as he was and feeling let down, Paul simply committed the whole thing to the Lord. His aim was not to show up the failures of friends but rather to highlight the glorious faithfulness of his Lord who stood by him as He always does. Try to imagine how Paul would find comfort in his knowledge of the great promises of God in the Old Testament. How real the words would be, "When you pass through the waters I will be with you" (Isa. 43:1,2); or "My presence shall go with you" (Exod. 33:14); or "... the Lord will take me up" (Ps. 27:1-14; cf. Isa. 49:14-16). Some commentators draw attention to the similarities with Psalm 22 which was quoted by our Lord on the Cross. These were indeed deep waters for Paul. He knew fellowship with Him who had said sadly to His friends, "Could you not watch with Me one hour?" (Matt.26:40)

4:16-18

Commentators are divided as to whether in these verses Paul is speaking of his present imprisonment which ended in his death or reminiscing about an earlier occasion (Acts 24 or 28) from which he was released and which led to a great opportunity to preach to "all the Gentiles" in the capital city of Rome. Certainly we can well

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imagine a man so near the end, thinking back over all God's wonderful dealings with him. Time and again it seemed that his work was going to be brought to a sudden and premature end but God worked deliverance. Think of Paul's words in 2 Cor. 6:9, "as dying, and behold we live," and "bearing in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus in order that". Paul "died" many times over, indeed he "died daily," (1 Cor. 15:31) and this is the pattern of all fruitful service. Except a corn of wheat falls into the ground and dies it remains alone, but if it dies it brings forth fruit (John 12:24). There are many deaths to die:- to sin, self and Satan, to the world, to reputation, popularity and personal pleasure, if we are to be Christ's servants. If everybody forsakes us then it must be accepted. But there will be those who will come (2 Tim. 1:15-17) and those we can send for, as Paul did in this final passage we have been studying. In the midst of all the uncertainty Paul seized the opportunity to proclaim the gospel and it seems from Matt. 10:16-42 that it is in the context of legal tribunals and social persecution that a great deal of witness takes place. These great men of old had a more realistic attitude to life than we have. They expected to see God actively work in the most unlikely situations. They were right.

4:16-18

We do not need to be too literal in identifying the situation of every phrase here. We are reading the words of the man who wrote Rom. 8:18, 24, 28-39. This is how Paul regarded life and how he addressed himself to it, persuaded that no matter what happened his destination was glory. Whichever imprisonment he was thinking of, the fact remains he was delivered from the lion's mouth by the God who shuts the mouths of lions (Dan. 6:22), including the particular roaring lion of 1 Pet. 5:8. When the Lord of salvation tells the accuser to shut up, he has no option (Zech. 3:1-5; cf. Job 1:7, 12). Paul goes on to say in v.18 that the Lord will rescue or deliver him from every evil. Some see a reference here to the Lord's Prayer, "Deliver us from evil," for the emphasis is undoubtedly one of triumph. Paul is not thinking of going down into death but rather up into glory, perhaps recalling the fiery chariot of Elijah (2 Kings 2:11,12) or the personal "removal" of Enoch (Gen. 5:24). His thought could not be otherwise for he had taught his converts about the irrelevance of death (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:13ff). In his confidence here Paul is at one with Peter (1 Pet. 1:3-5) and his doxology is indeed, "Blest be the everlasting God." How much we need to learn to think like this about life and death.

4:16-18

Take time today to consider how much we have to learn about ascribing glory to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We all have our favourite psalms and hymns of praise but we must learn to magnify the Lord. Think of the call in Ps. 24 that the gates might be opened to receive the King of Glory. Think of the hymn, "Glory be to God the Father," or the call to worship as the servants of God proclaim the great Name of the Saviour, "Ascribing salvation to Jesus our King." As we review life's experiences and are constrained to worship and give thanks, let our words be, "Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son." Paul would gladly "Worship the King, all glorious above," and go on to tell the story of the wonder of His love and the perfection of His providence. He would consider the heavens and say, "How great Thou art," bowing in adoration before Him whose ways are past finding out (Rom. 11:33-36). Contemplation is not an activity that comes naturally to people of this modern and rush -crazy age, and there can be an escapist element in it. But at the same time we need to rediscover both the peace and the dynamic that come from a true contemplation of the glory of God and the splendour of His person, His attributes and His activities. Paul certainly did, and for him the Lord's prayer was no mere religious formula. "Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever." Little wonder he says a hearty Amen. He does not mean that this is the end. It is a glorious beginning, for it is "world without end."

4:19

Paul finds difficulty in ending his epistle and so do we, for it has been a blessing to study it. The great man is very aware of certain individuals and possibly aware of the danger of naming some and not others. But he takes the risk, and why not, for he is facing imminent death and Priscilla and Aquila were among his closest, dearest, most loyal and long standing friends. Their home, the location of which varied depending on external circumstances in the political situation and on the needs of Christian service, was a veritable "Bethany" to the apostle. This thought of hospitality may be the reason why the wife, as hostess, is often mentioned before the husband. This couple had lived in Rome until a spell of anti-religious persecution during the reign of Claudius

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had driven them out. What were their thoughts? Were they depressed or just resigned to this kind of life at the mercy of rulers who were against the Jews? Little did they know the significance of what was about to happen to them in the gracious will of God. In Acts 18:1-4 we read of their meeting with Paul at a time when Paul was much in need humanly speaking (1 Cor. 2:3). There is every reason to believe that it was through Paul's influence and preaching that the next two named were brought to faith in Christ. It is amazing what can issue from a "chance" meeting! They became fellow workers with Paul in the service of the gospel. But it was not a selfish relationship for soon Paul left his friends to work in Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19). No doubt Paul could have done with their company and benefited from it, but the work had prior claim on all three of them. This is how real relationships are built. They are in Christ and for Christ.

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The story of this husband and wife team (Priscilla and Aquila) is a wonderful one for they had probably not been Christians all that long. They must have drunk in the apostle's teaching and we do well to follow their example, for it is the only way to be ready for God-given opportunities. Meeting this couple was a life changing experience for the young, eloquent and competent preacher called Apollos (Acts 18:24-26). He went on to a great public ministry but his helpers stayed in the background because to be public figures was not their calling. You can imagine how Apollos' ministry would be prayed for. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he sent greetings from Aquila and Priscilla (note the mention of the man first, a necessary thing to the Corinthian Christians who usually managed to get things out of perspective) and from the church meeting in their house in Ephesus. Paul knew that this couple would not have been forgotten in Corinth. Real grace and beneficial influence are seldom forgotten, whereas trouble-makers soon disappear into the limbo of forgetfulness and are not missed! In Romans 16:3-5 there is again mention of this couple, now back in Rome. and Paul refers to some occasion when they imperilled their lives for his sake. In today's verse they are back in Ephesus, no doubt giving to Timothy the same loyal and humble support they had given to Paul right through his ministry. Can you imagine Timothy's delight as a young minister adding such a couple to his congregational roll? Not all acquisitions are in that category. If, as some suggest, Priscilla and Aquila had been forced to leave Rome because of Nero's persecution, you begin to see how suffering and tribulation had indeed forged grace and faithfulness deep into their character (Rom 5:3-5; 2 Pet. 1:3-11). Perhaps we all have things too easily.

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Do not let the last statement of yesterday's reading lead to unbalanced thinking about the sore buffeting of our lives or the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" which have left scars and bruises which affect us deeply. The Lord never minimise our hurts, for He has shared "every pang that rends the heart," (Isa.63:9). There are tendernesses and sensitivities which have been produced in us, whether by the action or neglect of others, that leave us vulnerable. It is only Jesus who can heal, restore and reinstate our feelings and bring His own glorious liberty, so that we can begin to live again free from inhibitions and fears. People like Priscilla, Aquila, Onesiphorus, Paul himself and Timothy did not go through life without scars. Think of Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7-9) which was in fact part of the explanation of his usefulness. Think also of Timothy's fearful nature and sickly health which may have in fact been nervous in origin. God has indeed chosen the weak things of the world to do His work (1 Cor. 1:27-29). But how we need to remember His wonderful kindness and care, for He will never crush the sensitive hearts that trust Him (Isa. 42:3). We have spoken of Onesiphorus in the readings on 2 Tim. 1:16. What we emphasise is that it is real human beings the Lord uses. He takes us in our very varied gifts and capacities, but don't forget there is a limit to capacity and function as there is to faith (Rom. 12:3). And in the using of us He enables us to find ourselves and become our own true selves in a fullness of life that sometimes seems almost too good to be true. Certainly, at one time, it seemed to us a dream and a hope far beyond realisation that we could be of use to God.

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The names of these two men are mentioned no doubt because he knew Timothy would be concerned if Paul did not speak about his one time companions in missionary service. Erastus is spoken of in Acts 19:21-22 and Trophimus in Acts 20: 1-6. In Acts 21:27-33ff. Trophimus, being recognised as a Gentile, was the innocent cause of the riot which ended with Paul's arrest. Timothy would certainly be more than casually interested in these men because when you have gone through costly spiritual experiences together there is a bond of fellowship that lasts a very long time. We return tomorrow to the lesson to be learned from Trophimus' illness but here we mention the *suggestion* that Erastus is the same man as is mentioned in Rom. 16:23 and described as the city treasurer of Corinth. We cannot be sure about this identification but it leads to interesting speculation. In 2 Cor. 8:21-22 someone well known to the Corinthian church and apparently well qualified in money matters is being sent with others to carry the gifts of the church to Jerusalem. If this is the same Erastus then we have a civil servant in the employment of Rome making a clear confession of Christ and being in the position of taking "leave of absence" in order to carry out a specific piece of Christian service. In that case today's verse seems to suggest that on his return to Corinth he stayed there to bear witness, in the context, of daily life and work, to the Lord and to the gospel. The fact that these men are sometimes hard to identify and that we have little knowledge of them should be a great encouragement to us. Think of our own land in these perilous days and think of how many of the Lord's faithful people quite unknown to us are standing their ground in faithfulness, praying for the spiritual good of the nation and for the quickening of the church. Never be like Elijah when he thought that the cause was so small it was virtually lost. That can never be the case (1 Kings 19:1-4, 9-18).

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This simple statement about Trophimus being left behind from certain service because of illness is a great corrective to all the emotional but unbiblical attitude to what is commonly called "faith healing". Paul had a thorn in the flesh which was not removed and Timothy was a sickly person needing medical care. It would be preposterous to suggest that in these cases there was some significant lack of faith on their part explaining why their sicknesses remained. It is quite indefensible to say that it is never God's will that people should suffer illness, and equally unbiblical to say that God will always heal in answer to believing prayer. It is equally wrong to say that God never heals apart from the normal processes of medication or surgery. But we are denying Scripture testimony if we forget such men as Job who suffered almost beyond endurance, *not* because he was a secret backslider as his "friends" suggested, but because he was drawn profoundly, beyond his understanding, into the sovereign purposes of God in the heavenly places (Job chaps.1-2). We are twisting Scripture if we take such verses as Psalm 103:3 or Isa. 53:5b to mean that all will be healed. Those who state categorically that the commission of the church is to preach and to heal fail to recognise that the healing miracles of Christ and the Apostles were "*signs*" of the new thing that had begun with the coming of the Saviour. It remains God's prerogative to work outside of ordinary means as and when He will. But we must be careful not to build a structure which has no biblical warrant, because that leads to much distress and indeed to devilish tormenting for some who have been told that their illnesses, and those of their loved ones, are due to lack of faith, unforgiven sin or even to demon possession. Be careful. Be biblical. Let God be God.

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Whether life is long or short, smooth or rough, gloriously healthy or dogged with ill-health, our times are in God's hand (Ps. 31:15). It is God alone who has the ordering of our experience and His ways are perfect even if mysterious. If the things that happen to us lead to prayer and bring us closer to God, refining our characters and releasing our personalities, then we give thanks and confirm our trust in our wise and loving Father. Consider these words from Hendriksen's commentary: "It must have been hard for Trophimus to be left behind at Miletus, only thirty-six miles south of his home at Ephesus. And it must have been a sorrowful experience for Paul to discover that he did not at this occasion receive from His Lord the powers to heal. In God's sovereign providence believers, too, become ill (Elisha, 2 Kings 13:14; Hezekiah, 2 Kings 20:1; Paul, Gal. 4:13; Epaphroditus, Phil. 2:25-27; Timothy, 1 Tim. 5:23; Trophimus, 2 Tim. 4:20). They even die! The passage,

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'With his stripes we are healed,' does not mean that they have been exempted from the infirmities of the flesh. Often, to be sure, it pleases God to heal them, a blessing which arrives in answer to prayer (James 5: 14-15). But even if God's will be otherwise, theirs is ever the comfort of such passages as Ps. 23;27; 42; John 14:1-3; Rom. 8:35-39; Phil. 4:4-7; 2 Tim. 4:6-8; Heb. 4:16; 12:6, to mention only a few among many references."

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Paul's appeal here repeats his request in v.9, and he was no doubt aware of the fact that time would soon come when the wintry weather would close the shipping lanes. Perhaps they did not have strikes and "go slows" in these days but certainly these gospel missionaries were subject to all the trials and vexations of life as we know them. This is something we need to remember when we are praying for our missionaries. We tend sometimes to be too "spiritual" in our requests, forgetting the human tensions, strains, loneliness and home-sickness which can become the major areas of the Devil's attacks against the work. One of our missionaries spoke recently of having to cope with a plague of fleas in her house and of being so bitten that she was almost ashamed to go out into the street. How would we like to be stared at and how would we cope with that kind of thing? Paul was dreading the winter and the shadows of execution were heavy. Little wonder he wanted Timothy as soon as possible. Note also from this verse that all the believers had not fled from Rome. Some of them would have been slaves with no freedom of movement at all. Somehow, perhaps through Doctor Luke, they were in touch with Paul and asked to be remembered to Timothy. Three are named, and we know nothing about them although Timothy did, and with them are others also assuring Timothy of their care and prayers. This is something we do too seldom. We assume that people know we love them, care for them and pray for them, but what added blessing and encouragement comes when we tell them so! Isn't it amazing that the suffering Paul takes time and makes the effort to say all these personal things? His letter has made plain how much he sometimes longed that others would show the same care for him.

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How much attention do we really give to the Benediction at the end of a service or at the end of one of Paul's letters? These are not empty words nor a speculative prayer. There is assurance with Paul as he prays that the Lord Himself will be with Timothy as He had been with Paul. He can pray this because of God's faithful promise, "My presence shall go with you" (Ex. 33:14). It is prayer for an inward "presence", a spiritual assurance which cannot be denied or stolen away by any circumstances. Could Paul here be thinking of his own words in Rom. 8:14-17, 26-27, and in Phil. 1:6? Paul's prayer is for something very personal to Timothy, a closeness of the Lord Himself which would be a means of constant strengthening. Comparing this benediction with those in Gal. 6:18 and Philemon 25 one commentator says, "There the presence of 'the grace of the Lord,' here the presence of 'the Lord of grace' is invoked ". Just think of it: God Himself in all His fullness, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, always with us, ministering to us, and working for us (Rom. 8:26, 28, 31, 34). This is thrill indeed and gives confidence for the future. If God is indeed with us it does not really matter who is against us. The last statement of the letter could read, "Grace be with you all." All who will receive this letter and read it down through the ages are included in this final benediction which is as much a statement of fact as a prayer. Grace will be with us. Grace to cover all our sins; grace to meet every need; grace immediate and sufficient for every situation. It is grace on a lavish scale as Eph. 1:6-7; 2:1-10 makes plain. Is it not true that we have scarcely begun to grasp the wonder of it all? Our testimony will always be that the half has not been told us of all His power and grace. When we see things as they really are when we finally are in the presence of His glory it will not be hard to cast our crowns before Him, lost in wonder love and praise. It will seem the most natural and obvious thing to do. Before starting a new series of studies and seeing that we are surrounded by the memories of a great company of saints (Heb. 12:1-2), let us think of Paul's testimony in 2 Cor. 4:16-18. In that light, and having regard to Rev. 22:1-5, look up and read the hymn by William Walsham How. "For all the saints who from their labours rest".

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