

George Philip Bible Readings

The Book of Timothy I

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1:1-2

This is the first of the group of three books of the New Testament called the Pastoral Epistles, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. They are concerned with the ordering of the life, work and witness of the church in the world, facing, as she always does, dangerous pressures from secular society and from within her own membership. In 6:20 the charge to guard the gospel seems to sum up all Paul has been saying in his letters. In 1 Cor. 4:1-2; 2 Cor. 4:1-2 he emphasised faithful and responsible stewardship. In Acts 20:25-31 and Gal. 1:6-9 there is emphatic warning that the truth will always be attacked and denied. In Col. 2:8 the church is put on its guard against the inroads of philosophical theology whereby biblical truth is displaced by mere human reasoning. In 2 Thess. 2:1-2 there is reference to spurious letters claiming to be by the hand of Paul and having the effect of confusing the believers regarding the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ. The list of references to danger could be a long one. In 1 Cor. 15 there is the answer to those who were denying the physical resurrection of Jesus. In 2 Tim. 4:1-5 we have reference to times when the church will have a distaste for sound biblical ministry, preferring other "more spiritual" activities, more geared to pleasure and having less of the "death to self" emphasis. In Titus 1:9-11 there is highlighted the need to teach and so to counteract false teaching. In Jude 3-4 we are faced with the need to contend for the faith inside the church. The situation as it was long ago is the situation now. That is why we must get to grips with this epistle.

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1:1-2

The historical background is difficult to ascertain with complete accuracy. At the end of Acts (28:30-31) Paul seems to have been in open custody, with a real degree of freedom to minister. In 2 Tim. 2:8; 4:6ff, he is undergoing harsh imprisonment, abandoned by all his friends and facing death. Between these two spells he seems to have travelled widely to Ephesus (1:3), Crete (Tit. 1:5), Nicopolis (Tit. 3:12) and Miletus (2 Tim. 4:13). When he wrote the second letter to Timothy he was back again in Rome. Right to the end he was indeed a true apostle on his Master's business. It seems certain Paul was aware that his time was running out. Churches had been planted in many places but his eyes were still on the horizons of the world (Rom. 15:23-24; 2 Cor. 10:16) and his heart was alive to the unfinished task outlined in the great commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). By the time 1 Timothy was written all the great New Testament epistles were in circulation, expounding the theology of the Gospel and grounding the believers in the things most surely believed (Lk. 1:1). There was a clear body of saving truth to which the church was committed (Jude 3; 2 John 10) and now Paul is concerned about the future witness of the church and the leadership of those who would be raised up to carry forward the work after him. The Pastoral Epistles are mainly concerned therefore with church order; they are full of practical advice and theological statement; and they emphasise right doctrine, right conduct and right administration. All of this was in the interest of the on-going work and witness of the church in a generation of material and moral confusion.

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1:1-2

Keep in mind that a mere thirty years had gone past since the great events of the death and resurrection of Christ and the mighty revival of Pentecost. A year after that Paul was converted. In AD 47 the missionary journeys began and by AD 62 Paul was in Rome. Was he there when Rome burned and the Christians were blamed for it by Nero (AD 64)? Tradition has it Paul died round about AD 67 and from then on right to the time of Constantine (AD 300) the emperors of Rome persecuted the church. It is to face that kind of situation that Paul wrote this epistle to prepare the church for its years of conflict. The need was for foundation and stability in order to guarantee continuance. He began this letter with a firm declaration of his apostolic authority and he aligned himself with Timothy. The young preacher and those to whom he ministered were reminded that the matters of the gospel were not an area of free-for-all opinions. This was important to affirm at the beginning of the second generation of Christian life and witness. Enthusiasm is not enough. There must be unchanging truth, and to that truth Paul was bound by the command of God. The sum and substance of his message is Christ Jesus, because everything is

summed up in Him (Col.1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-3). Christ is our sure hope in an uncertain world that grows increasingly hopeless. We are saved in hope (Rom. 8:24), and we rejoice in hope (Rom. 5:2; 12:12) finding that hope to be a sure anchor of our souls (Heb. 6:18-19). Without this throb of certainty we will be uncertain messengers of the Gospel.

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1:1-2

Note the unusual reference to God as Saviour. Paul was preserving here a vital fact, namely the sovereignty of God in our salvation. It was God who freely sent His Son (John 3:16; Gal. 4:4). It was God who commended His love to us when we were still sinners (Rom. 5:6-8); who chose us in Christ before the worlds began (Eph. 1:4); and who made us alive by the power of His mighty Spirit so that we could hear and believe (Eph. 2:1-4; Gal. 1:15). It was God, in Christ, who reconciled the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19); who dealt with sin's guilt and power for ever (Col. 2:13-15; Heb. 9:11-14). It is God who justifies the believing sinner so that none can ever countermand salvation (Rom. 8:31-34). It was God Himself in His Son Jesus Christ who paid the price and met the judgment of sin (1 John 2:2; 4:10). God provided the Lamb for the sacrifice (John 1:29) and God laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:4-6). Salvation is God's work and is therefore perfect, providing for us a great tower of secure peace. In the phrase "God our Saviour" Paul may also have been countering the contemporary notion of salvation coming from and by Caesar, (that is, by the State). There is still this idolatry and error on the part of many who look to the State as their real hope and defence. It is not so for Christians. We do not despise organised government of whatever kind (Rom.13:1-7), and we are commanded to pray for all who rule (1 Tim.2:1-2). But our hope is in Christ Jesus, a heavenly and human Saviour, and we look for His coming again. Everything is future, and it is sure.

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1:1-2

We progress slowly but we are reading many Scriptures as we do so and are learning many basic lessons. One such lesson concerns the rich value of a word of encouragement. Timothy must have been blessed and helped by Paul's open statement of affection and confidence (2). How different is the attitude that never speaks words of praise or thanks. How precious are the bonds of love and respect between those of different generations who are engaged in the Lord's service. The big man was not too "big" to recognise the worth of his successor, whom he himself had brought to salvation and trained in Christian discipleship (2 Tim. 1:6; 3:10-14). Paul's normal greeting of grace and peace has the added word "mercy", and this may signify that, nearing the end of his days, the aged saint was more conscious than ever of God's pardoning mercy towards a great sinner (Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim.1:15). Perhaps it has also some reference to the kind tenderness of God, merciful and mighty, full of care and compassion. Certainly the words of a man who knew he was near eternity are full of meaning and he spoke to reassure Timothy. As it had been with Paul so for Timothy there would be grace in all its amazing fulness to meet his every need. The same merciful God would attend his way, and in consequence there would be peace passing all understanding (Phil. 4:5-7). The God of peace, who is by no means lacking in power (Heb. 13:20-21), who has made and secured everlasting peace by the blood of the Cross (Col. 1:20), and who is always at peace in Himself, would be Timothy's God all along the way.

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1:3-7

The need for the assurances in the opening verses is seen as Paul launches into his theme and we begin to be aware of the demanding situation Timothy had to face in Ephesus. The picture of Ephesus is given in Acts 19:1-20, especially in v.8-10, linked with 1 Cor.16:9-11, and Rev. 2:1-7. The situation was by no means desolate, but there were problems, oppositions and stubborn resistance to ministry. This seems to have brought Timothy under pressure and he was tempted to move out. But Paul, realising that only an authentic ministry of the Word could prevent further decay and could begin to build the church in that city, urged him *again* (3) to stay on, to stand his ground, and to continue his ministry. There is a time to shake the dust from your feet when a situation is manifestly untenable (Luke 9:5) as Paul himself had done earlier in Ephesus (Acts 19:8-9). But there is also a time to

recognise that the work of the Word of God is spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10ff), that opposition to it is to be expected, and that the thing to do is to stand firm in the assurance that the gates of hell shall not prevail (Matt. 16:18). Indeed, opposition can often be a very good sign. It signifies that the Devil is taking the work seriously. An elder said to his minister, "If you are never confronted by the Devil you must be travelling in the same direction." Of course, we must see to it that the opposition is caused by the message and not by our own stupid and stubborn offensiveness (1 Pet. 4:14ff).

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1:3-7

It is sobering to see how soon false doctrine had entered the life of the church and how serious an influence it had become. The thing to do was not for the biblical evangelicals to contract out, but to affirm with all the authority of God the true doctrines of the Word. No doubt this is easier for ministers and missionaries who have authority to teach than for members of congregations who may be under the leadership of men who do not hold to the truth. But "escape" is not necessarily the way. Who knows what changes God is planning? Some, in our own church many years ago, held on in almost despairing faith and lived to see a biblical ministry established. Timothy, early in his ministry, was compelled to face the fact that truth and error would always be in conflict. Already, it is clear, there was a recognised standard of Christian doctrine about which there was no liberty of opinion. Some were not holding to this and Timothy was called on to charge them, that is, to take a strong line with them in respect of their error. We are not told exactly what their error was. It is spoken of as "myths and old wives tales" (4:7; 2 Tim. 4:4) which may have been fables or legends added on to Old Testament stories and possibly wild allegorical interpretations of lists of names or numbers. Whatever they were these secondary or sideline matters were being sought after, just as people nowadays seek after novelties in biblical truth and practice. But they were being made frontline matters and being regarded as the "real" spiritual issues. This is dangerous.

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1:3-7

There are always those who try to make some interpretation of prophecy or some spiritual gift or some particular pattern of conversion experience the touchstone of real spirituality. Such people go to Scripture to look for texts (regardless of context) that will confirm their already fixed opinions. This leads to endless discussions and speculations which become more and more removed from Scripture, more and more individualistic, and less and less useful or profitable in the business of growing in grace and maturity. Paul refers to the people preoccupied in this way in 2 Tim. 3:6-9 and in today's passage (4b). He makes it plain that such people never commit themselves to the divine training or discipline of faith whereby people become working servants of Christ. Other references to this kind of thing in the life of the church are found in Col. 2: 1-4, 8-10 where some were insisting that more than just Jesus was needed for *real* salvation; and 16-23 where some were insisting on a certain pattern of activity, positive and negative, in order to be *really* Christian. In Gal. 5:1-8 Paul answers those who insisted that circumcision as well as faith was necessary to be a real Christian. These are serious errors. Christ is everything and if we have Christ, in whom is all the fulness of God (Col.1:19) then we need nothing more. Those who insist we need something extra have departed from Scripture. What happens is that someone's individual experience, or a rock musician's song, or a film director's interpretation becomes the guiding principle of faith and life. This is a contemporary problem and we look tomorrow at what Paul says about it.

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1:3-7

Timothy, as minister of the congregation in Ephesus, had problems on three levels. The atmosphere in the city seems to have been a mixture of materialism and demonism. How often these two 'spirits' belong together. Timothy's own personality was marked by fear, timidity and vulnerability (2 Tim.1:7) and physically he was not robust (1 Tim. 5:23). Thirdly the development of the life of the congregation was unbalanced. This problem was arising from the Influence as well as the teaching of certain individuals (3) whom Paul could identify but did not name. These persons may well have been disturbed by this revelation that they and their activities were known,

marked and assessed as being against the interest of the gospel. They were a faction who were, on the basis of their own spiritual opinion of themselves, critical of and against the leadership of the minister. Such were the pressures of the situation that Timothy was tempted to resign. But Paul urged him to stay on because, if he left, then disaffected Christians would have succeeded in bringing to a premature end a ministry instituted and ordained by God through accepted apostolic authority. This raises a question for all of us in our respective congregations. Are we working for or against the authentic ministry of the Word? Many ministers who have at great cost stood against the oppositions of the godless and have built a spiritual work have broken under the onslaught of criticism, denigration, distraction and opposition of converted folk. What does God think of that?

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1:3-7

In v.5 Paul states that the aim of his charge to Timothy (3) and the aim of every true minister and ministry is to produce love, purity, integrity and faith (5). In 4b Paul has contrasted those whose influence is to promote controversies in the congregation with those who promote God's work. Here is a test of our spirituality. To what extent do we take our rightful share in the work of the congregation to which we belong? What God looks for and the Spirit within seeks to produce are the graces of love to God and to man, letting the heart go out to God and to His people. It needs a pure or single heart fixed on God so that there are no competitors and no distractions (Phil.3:12-14). It calls for a good conscience with self examination that is not morbid but is concerned that nothing should mar a right relationship with God and man. It includes a spirit of godly sorrow and repentance (2 Cor. 7:10) that goes again and again for pardon and cleansing, keeping short accounts with God. This means a faith that is well grounded in God, neither formal nor superficial, but a faith that makes manifest that you are mastered by Christ. Over against this Paul speaks of those who are merely verbal and argumentative believers and he declares they have swerved and wandered off their true course. They are professing Christians who have got lost in the labyrinth of their own undisciplined and uninstructed thinking. How sad!

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1:7-11

Paul believes in plain speaking when the truth of the gospel and the witness of the church are imperilled. He is not afraid to point the finger, but in summing up his rebuke and denunciation in v.7 he is ready to go on immediately to teaching which is both instructive and corrective. In v.7 he described the problem people as being ambitious to be teachers of God's law, but he pointed out earlier that they were simply confusing people with side issues. Now he says they lack understanding and their pronouncements come from ignorance. This is strong language in reference to those who certainly regarded themselves as being front rank people in the church. What was their motive for wanting to teach and preach? Was it influence, position or power over others? Did their teaching simply impress the hearers with their own biblical cleverness or did they make the Word of God bread for people's souls? This is the searching test for all of us in Christian work. Do we do it for the glory of God and the good of His people or for self-display? All who take it on themselves to teach others need to be clearly mindful of the warning in James 3:1. It is the awareness of being answerable to God for what we say and the influence we thus exert that should keep us from handling the things of God in a way that is unworthy. Remember that our over-clever words can rob the gospel of its power and make it useless (1 Cor.1:17).

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1:8-11

Having mentioned the Law (7), Paul goes on to expound something of the significance of God's moral Law, the Ten Commandments. This is not a digression because in Ephesus some teachers of the Word were tending to bring Christians into bondage to a set of rules, and that is not authentic Christian life. Law-keeping is not the way of salvation nor the way of Christian life. Christ is our life and we live to please Him on the basis of loving obedience. But this does not mean we cast aside God's Law. The Law is good in itself, not least because it is an expression of the character of the God of righteousness. But it has to be used for its true purpose which is in relation to transgression (Gal.3:19a). Its function is to exercise restraint and control over us in relation to sin, to expose sin,

and to lead to Christ (Rom.7:7-12). Then, when we have come in faith to Jesus, we are assured that the judgment and penalty pronounced by the Law have been paid on the Cross (Rom.8:1). We are then set free from the condemnation of the Law (but not its moral precepts) to live unto Jesus, to please Him and not to labour under a set of rules that keep us constantly in fear of failure. Of course, although the believer is a "saint" he is still a sinner, for he has two natures. Even though he now wants to please God and delight in His will there is that in him which wages war and makes him want to kick over the traces. When he strays, the Law goes after him like a sheepdog to bring him back to the shepherd. But the believer does not live his life in bondage to law, but in the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:21).

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1:8-11

The Law of God stands to expose and condemn, and its sanctions are backed by the eternal Throne of God. When a generation becomes law-less and anti-law (as in our own generation) then the hideous things listed here become the commonplace elements of the life of society. Note how Paul lists first sins against God and then offences against men, just as the Ten Commandments do. What we all tend to forget (and especially unbelievers) is that there is guilt, accountability and judgment pronounced by God's Law in respect of all moral wrongdoing. To persist in a sin is to manifest a spirit of rebellion against God and a refusal of the doctrine of the gospel. Paul is quite clear in affirming that the sickness of society stems from the spirit that rejects God and devalues what is sacred. Think of how increasingly the secularising of society in the name of "humanism" has led to the brutalising of life and the degeneration of relationships. This cannot be separated from man's refusal of God's revealed truth. In Rom.1:18 Paul speaks of men suppressing the truth by their wickedness, or in the interest of their wickedness. Fallen man prefers darkness to light for obvious reasons (John 3:19), and his choice leads to the sickness of society. Whatever is contrary to the sound and health-giving gospel, whether it be intellectual pride or social snobbery or any other thing, it takes its place in the list of evils which are an offence to God and a blight on human life. Where the gospel is on the ascendant human life is holier, healthier and happier.

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1:8-11

Two things thrilled Paul all his days: the glorious gospel of which he was never ashamed (Rom.1:16) and the fact that he had been called to be a minister (Eph. 3:8). He never lost his sense of wonder and gratitude, and the more he pondered the more his mind, heart and spirit were enlarged and stimulated. The glorious gospel is the gospel of the glory of the blessed God. This links with his words in 2 Cor. 4:4-6 describing the gospel as a manifestation of the glory of God. The description of God as "blessed" (repeated in 6:15-16) must speak of the eternal splendour, magnificence and perfection that are His and His alone (cf. 2 Pet. 1:16-17). How seldom we take time to consider the person of God "infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth" (Shorter Catechism). This is why we know so little about worship whereby every faculty we possess is engaged in the consideration of this God whose glory is seen in the good news of the Gospel. Read Hebrews 1:1-3. God has spoken in His Son Jesus Christ. His glorious grace has come down to us in Jesus Christ. The light of glory shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot put it out (John 1:5). God comes to turn people from darkness to light (Acts 26:18) and He has entrusted this message to frail believing men and women such as Paul, and you and me. What a thrill and what a responsibility! Little wonder Paul said, Woe is me, if I do not preach the gospel (1 Cor. 9:16).

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1:12-14

We must take all these verses carefully because the mature and experienced man of God is opening his heart in order to instruct the young minister. It is a privilege indeed to sit at the feet of one who has remained faithful to Christ and His calling throughout a lifetime of suffering. The responsibility that is ours as stewards of the gospel (spoken of yesterday) is one that is provided for by heavenly strength. Was Paul thinking of God's words in 2 Cor.12:6-10? He is not only aware of being called to service but also of being provided for. He knew the promise:

"As your days so shall your strength be" (Deut. 33:25 AV). He had made it his testimony that all God called for would carry God's enabling (Phil. 4:13). Paul was very clear that he had not chosen to be a minister. He had been appointed by God (Acts 26:15-19ff; Gal. 1:11-17; 2 Tim. 1:11-12). This was a source of astonishment to him. Why should such a blasphemous, contemptuous, persecuting Pharisee be made a chosen vessel for the Lord? The only explanation was in God's free and sovereign grace whereby Paul's eyes had been opened, faith created, and love born in his heart by Christ Jesus. The longer Paul companied with Jesus the more he saw the wonder of God's grace coming to him in salvation and calling him to service. Think how he speaks of it in 1 Cor.15:7-11. It was no pious phrase when he described himself as the worst of sinners, He really saw himself as just that. Little wonder he went on to make a glorious statement about the essence of the gospel (15).

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1:12-14

We must still consider Paul's meaning when he speaks about receiving mercy because he acted in ignorance and unbelief. It is all too easy to excuse our sins and say that we did not mean it or that we did not realise what we were doing. How could Paul plead ignorance? He knew the facts of Christ and the church and set himself to oppose and persecute (Acts 9:1-2). He had consented to the death of Stephen, seen his angelic appearance and heard him pray for pardon for his persecutors. But there is such a thing as a spirit of ignorance for which allowance is made as in Acts 3:17; 1 Cor. 2:8. On the other hand ignorance can be deliberate cf. Eph. 4:18; 2 Pet. 3:5; Rom. 1:18, 28; 10:3. There is still another element in blindness and it is Satanic (2 Cor. 4:4) Think of Jesus' prayer from the Cross asking forgiveness for those who did not know what they were doing. Some were dupes of the Devil and led away into evil by the influence and instrumentality of men. Their weakness had left them open to manipulation. But men like the chief priests were in a different category. It was not their weakness but rather the strength of their pride that led them on in defiance of God. This was the essence of Satan's sin. There was no physical or emotional weakness giving opportunity to sin. It was in every sense deliberate and calculated (Isa.14:12-14). Paul seems to be thinking of how near he had got to that kind of sin in his proud Pharisaic superiority. Perhaps the reason why Paul needed to be prostrated so radically on the road to Damascus was that he was near the point of no return. He saw then what he was doing, what he was becoming and how near Hell he had reached. It was a "shocking" conversion.

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1:15-16

The phrase "a trustworthy saying" ("the saying is sure" RSV) is unique to the Pastoral Epistles and is found here and in 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim, 2:11; Titus 3:8. In each case it seems to highlight some statement or affirmation in common use in the church and Paul is emphasising to Timothy the fundamental nature of certain truths. In today's verses we have a statement that is worthy to be accepted without any qualification whatever. It is a truth that stands at the heart of the whole Christian faith. It corrects the false attitude that would reduce Christ to a mere teacher, leader or moralist. The whole point of His coming was to be a Saviour from sin. He came to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb.8:26). In His death and resurrection He abolished death (2 Tim.1:10). He died the just for the unjust to bring us to God (1 Pet. 3:18) and He took our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Pet. 2:24). This is the gospel that goes right to the heart of human experience as man labours under the guilt and power of sin, and under the jurisdiction of Satan himself (Col.1:12-13; 2:13-15). This is the Christ who never changes (Heb. 13:8) and who is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him (Heb. 7:25). This is the Christ Paul himself was determined to preach wherever he went (1 Cor.2:2). This is the message for sinners, and the more Paul preached it the more he saw it was for him. This is how it always is. The more you see the wonder of God's saving grace the more you see what a sinner you are.

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1:15-16

What encouragement there is here for those who are praying for friends and family who are not yet Christian. Who would ever have thought that the ranting, raving, virulent persecutor of everything Christian would become the mighty missionary apostle (Acts 9:1ff). We tend to concentrate our evangelistic hopes on what we would consider

to be "hopeful" cases from "sympathetic" backgrounds and living in "workable" areas. God plucked this man Saul out of the Sanhedrin, the citadel of dead, legalistic religion that had a Hellish hatred of the doctrines of grace and salvation by faith alone. Perhaps Paul was thinking of people who had prayed for him and perhaps had grown disheartened. His relatives in Rom.16:7 may well have been brothers or cousins and they were converted before Paul. Now, says Paul, think of the patience or longsuffering of Jesus in respect of me, allowing me to go on so far and so long in unbelief. Take heart. Think of the dying thief who was converted at the last moment after a lifetime of crime (Lk. 23:39-43). Paul goes on to refer to his own conversion and subsequent life of service as an example to all who would yet be converted. It seems he is saying that what God had done with him God could do with others, Timothy included. It is wrong to think of "great men" as essentially belonging to the past. We must cry to God in prayer to raise up again men like this to turn the world upside down. God is able, and our thoughts and expectations are too small.

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1:17

We seem nowadays to have little knowledge of or inclination to sing doxologies in terms like this. We tend to talk and sing far more about our own limited experiences, and we are the losers. Having spoken of the marvellous outreaching of grace to great sinners; having indicated the wide possibilities of the evangelistic message of the gospel; having looked forward in faith to the great multitude which no man can number (Rev. 7:9ff); and having at least hinted that, for individual believers and for the church, God is able to do far above all we can ask, think or imagine (Eph. 3:20-21; 1 Cor. 2:9 AV), Paul now turns his whole attention to the person of God and expresses his worship, praise and adoration in a way we do well to copy. You cannot "work up" this kind of worship. It is only as you learn what God is like that your spirit is quickened within you and thrills to the facts of salvation and life. God is the king of the ages, exercising His kingship on earth and heaven in a way that neither man nor Devil can countermand. All honour, glory and blessing belong to Him by right (Rev. 5:12-13; 7:12). He is the God who is "Perfect in power, in love and purity." (Heber) Think of the great hymns of worship that are all too sadly out of fashion in evangelical circles, giving place to catchy tunes and easily forgotten words. Words that stretch our thinking and humble our hearts do us good when we sing them. For example:

"Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible, hid from our eyes.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light
Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight.

All laud we would render: O help us to see
'Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee." (W.C.Smith)

How we need the affirmation at the start of all services: Let us worship God.

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1:18-20

Paul takes up here the theme of a charge to the young minister which he began in v-3-5. Already it is clear that Timothy is called not only to proclaim but to defend and preserve the gospel. This is important for us also because we must seek to guarantee that the generation coming after us has a clear grasp of the truth. Timothy was going to have a battle to wage, as Paul made plain. Sometimes there are open attacks on basic doctrines and these have to be confronted and refuted. Sometimes the attack is more subtle, in terms of divergences from the truth and of lowering of standards of Christian behaviour. Those called to the ministry must be clear and decisive in their discernment and decision, not regarding as innocent "variations" opinions that are in fact basic departures from the truth. This being so, a man must be sure he is in the ministry by the clear call and command of God. This is not just a matter of his own inner persuasion. Paul spoke to Timothy of how there had been a consensus of opinion in the church regarding his call, suitability and selection. It seems that others were aware of Timothy's call before he was

and they spoke by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to this effect. This does not necessarily refer to what is called "charismatic" prophecy because God is not confined to one specific method of making His will known. It may simply have been that wise and discerning and praying people in the congregation had become persuaded that this young man was indeed called of God. This is every bit as spiritual as waiting for someone to be prompted to "volunteer". It is safe. It is the church acting as the church. But, of course, it means we need to be members of a fellowship. That is the best place in which to become aware of God's will. Read carefully Acts 16:1-3.

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1:18-20

It is clear that the Christians in the New Testament were fully aware that life and service would be spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10ff), and we forget this to our cost. The way to fight is first to be aware of the call and the initiative of God, as Timothy has just been reminded. Then we must hold to the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). This involves conviction, commitment and confidence. If we begin to doubt the objective truth of the message then our personal subjective faith will weaken, and confusion and uncertainty will be ascendant. But holding to the truth must be married to a clear conscience and a pure heart (v.5). This was Paul's own earnest attitude (Acts 24:16). Peter also emphasised it (1 Pet. 3:16). There is no substitute for dealing rightly with God and man, and that means keeping short accounts. Trifling with sin is dangerous and can be disastrous, as it had been with the two men mentioned in v.19-20. They are described as shipwrecked believers, off course, on the rocks, pounded by stormy seas and with rescue not at all certain. We are not told exactly what their error was but Hymenaeus is mentioned again in 2 Tim. 2:14-19 in respect of false ideas about the resurrection. His companion was different this time and it may be that Hymenaeus was the kind of man who, by his strong influence, was a constant danger to the congregation. This called for discipline and we must consider this theme tomorrow.

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1:18-20

Whatever the particular error of Hymenaeus and Alexander ("conscience" may indicate some moral wrong either in action or attitude), Paul judged it to be blasphemy, that is, contempt or indignity toward God. It was something that could not be left unchallenged. The individuals concerned were in danger, as were the message and witness of the church. What v.20b indicates is not simply that these men had removed themselves from the protection of God and exposed themselves to the power of Satan, but that they had been specifically disciplined by Paul in the name of God. This tends to shake modern Christian thinking because we do not take kindly to the idea of discipline. We do not seem to regard moral and spiritual wrong as being all that serious and even when we do, the idea of any real punishment is abhorred on the ground that "we must not judge". But when the name of God is dishonoured and poison is being let loose in the life-stream of the fellowship then we must judge. It is not clear what "delivering to Satan" means. It is more than just natural consequences. It may refer to excommunication, that is being barred from the Lord's Table for a specified season in order to administer rebuke and encourage repentance. This seems to be the meaning in 1 Cor. 5:1-5, although reference to the day of the Lord seems very "long-term". In 2 Cor. 2:4-11 we are told of the repentance and restoration of the wrongdoer. But it is not always so, as Matt.18:15-18 makes plain. The one who refuses to be corrected goes the way of Satan. Some suggest the delivering to Satan speaks of physical consequences being visited on spiritual wrongdoing, and Acts 5:1-11;13:9-11 seem to support this, although Ananias and Sapphira may not have been converted and Elymas was a sorcerer. However, in 1 Cor. 11:30 we are dealing with believers. It is all a solemn issue and should make us slow to react with resentment when we are rebuked.

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2:1-4

In his charge to Timothy Paul gives priority to prayer, and he urged this minister to see to it that prayer was not allowed to degenerate to an "optional extra" for congregations or individual believers. It is interesting that this theme comes right after talk about blasphemy against God and a wrong conscience. Why is it that so many Christians go to their church prayer-meeting only if they have time and energy left after all their other

commitments and involvements? This is not fighting the good fight (1:18). As the first responsibility of the church in the world Paul calls for prayer. This takes precedence even over evangelism. We are dealing here with the life of the church and its gathering for worship. The first thing it must do is to come to God, to deal with God and to give God His rightful place. It is then that we begin to realise that we are in fact fellow-workers with God in the interest of and furtherance of His purposes in the world through the gospel. Now, in many lands more and more of the avenues of active evangelism are being closed, and in many lives circumstances inhibit opportunity for testimony and service. But one realm of activity in the defence and proclamation of the gospel is always possible, even when the preacher is in prison and that is prayer (Phil. 1:16-17). The fields are white unto harvest.... pray therefore (Jn. 4:35).

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2:1-4

The church is in the world not as spectator or adviser but to engage by spiritual dynamic in all the areas where decisions are made. We see in v.2 something of Paul's statesmanship in the affairs of Christ's kingdom. He was not thinking so much of believers taking their place and exercising influence in the various organised bodies that control and direct the affairs of society although that certainly has its place, a costly place! Christians not so involved should be slow to criticise the *apparent* compromise or lack of clear statement of those who are involved. It is primarily by prayer that the influence of God is brought to bear on the decision making political machine, and the objective stated here is not the conversion of world leaders (although that is needed and is a glorious aim) but the kind of government that will ensure a measure of peace and freedom so that the gospel may be preached freely. We may not criticise governments if we do not pray for them and if we deplore laws that seem to make life easier for sin and crime and evildoers then we must learn to pray more. When we find the work of the gospel assailed and restricted and persecuted then we must do as the apostolic church did. They prayed and government action was miraculously over-ruled (Acts 12:1-5). If we find that the preaching of the Word is being hindered by whatever means, then we must pray for utterance and for an open door for the Word (Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:3; 2 Thess, 3:1). Prayers for kings and rulers *must* be part of our prayer life if we are to be biblical Christians.

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2:1-4

It is difficult to know the exact differences in the various words used to speak of prayer and we must always be careful not to impose an artificial pattern. Supplications (requests) seem to be petitions in respect of deeply felt, specific needs, our own and those of others. Prayers seem to be general speaking to God, bringing to God all the ordinary, on-going things of life. Intercessions seem best understood in the customary sense of praying for others, and doing so with confidence in the presence of God. Think of how both the Son and the Spirit, intercede for us (Rom. 8:27, 34; Heb. 7:25). Thanksgiving is the element always associated with prayer and so often forgotten. Do we thank God for His kindness to us; for His giving us others who love us and pray for us; and for rulers and for the benefits of the situations we find ourselves in? How we need to learn to pray and to recognise the vast scope of prayer. We are to pray for all the world, refusing to be conditioned by race, colour, prejudice or preferences. It is easy to pray for friends but we are to pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44-45) praying for their salvation and not their rebuke and judgment! We must not give up prayer too soon simply because the answer does not come (Dan. 9:23; 10:12-14). Indeed we are to pray until forbidden by God (Jer.7:16; 11:14; 14:10-12). How we need to come to grips in a practical way with the oft quoted verse, 2 Chronicles 7:14, reading it in the context of 2 Chronicles 7:12-22.

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2:1-4

We must still consider v.4 which has become a battle ground for theological argument. What does Paul mean by the word "all"? Is he simply emphasising that the gospel goes far beyond the confines of the Jewish people to all nations, ranks and races? In v.2 the word cannot mean "every single person" in high places and in v.4 it cannot mean every single man, woman and child because we know from Scripture and from experience that all will not be

saved. Only one dying thief came to faith and Jesus spoke of men dying in their sins (John 8:21, 24) and John 3:16 speaks of the reality of perishing in unbelief. This verse cannot mean that God desires salvation for all but is frustrated by man's unbelief, because that would mean that sinner man is stronger than God and that the final decision for salvation rests with man and not God. There is no comfort there! It would also mean that the death of Christ would be ineffective for some. It would be "wasted". But it is right here that language and logic are seen to be limited when it comes to expressing the deep mysteries of God's saving purposes, for we have Jesus saying, "How often I would have gathered you but you would not." (Lk. 13:34; Matt. 23:37). Again He said, "All the Father gives Me shall come to Me" (John 6: 37). There is nothing uncertain about the plan of salvation. Christ came to save sinners (1:15), not just to make it possible for them to be saved. He secured eternal salvation (Heb. 9:12) and the work of the Holy Spirit is to call sinners to faith, not merely to invite them. Salvation is of God from beginning to end. His decisions are beyond space and time. (Eph.1:4) And when we "limit" Him and His working to the confines of our understanding, we go beyond Scripture.

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2:1-4

Without seeking to enter into lengthy argument with those who hold to the doctrine of "limited atonement", that is, that Christ died only for the elect; and without departing from Scripture truth that only the elect shall finally be saved, we make some further observations. The significance of the Cross in relation to the angelic world (Eph.1:10; Col.1:20; 2:15) and in relation to the whole order of creation (Rom.8:19-22) is quite staggering and does not marry well to the word "limited". We cannot limit the free sovereignty of God who is not under obligation to save sinners at all, and who is free to bestow His grace-gifts on whoever He chooses. We cannot limit the reality of the call to repentance and faith in the proclamation of the gospel, nor can we ignore the reality of unbelief and rejection which is spoken of in one place as crucifying Christ afresh (Heb.6:6). We dare not steal from any believer the gospel comfort of the words of Jesus, "You have not chosen Me, I have chosen you," (John 15:16) nor the gospel assurance that whom God justifies He glorifies (Rom. 8:30). But neither can we disregard the fact and reality of unbelief and rejection in the face of the gospel. What we can do is to herald with all the conviction of our hearts the Biblical truth that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and it is in the context of gospel proclamation that faith and unbelief both come into evidence. It pleases God through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (1Cor.1:21). Every conversion is a miracle, a resurrection from the dead (Eph. 2:4-6), and when we start trying to "explain" miracles we are in trouble.

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2:5-6

Note how this whole passage (1-6) began with the theme of the prayer-life of the church. Prayer is grounded in the great redeeming purpose of God and has as its central affirmation the uniqueness, supremacy and necessity of Jesus Christ. This is a word that is needed as much now as when it was first written. The world and the world's religions are always seeking to affirm that there are many "gods", many valid "ways" to God and many different "persons", "beings" and "agencies" whereby people may come to God. Gurus, saints, prophets and the Virgin alike are appealed to so that they might intercede with God on man's behalf. But Jesus said no man could come to God apart from Him (John 14:6), and apostolic preaching declared there was no other name given whereby men could be saved (Acts 4:12). This emphasis is needed today when many say the church has no right to send out missionaries because the nations all have their own gods and their own ideas of salvation. But if God has spoken and made Himself known in history in His Son Jesus Christ then opinions about God are no longer valid. Neither are we allowed to have our own opinions about salvation. There is but one Mediator who stands between sinner man and offended God. This is the great theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews where we are shown God's Man, tempted like us, feeling for us, acting for us, and by His own death making atonement for sin, thus reconciling us to God (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:14-15; 9:11-14).

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2:5-6

Christ's mediatorial work has been introduced in the context of prayer, and we do well to consider this aspect of how He "stands in" for us. He is our Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1), and He is our ever-living intercessor (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). By the Holy Spirit He also works His work within us (Rom. 8:26-27) overcoming our weakness. But it is Christ's atoning work that is significantly in Paul's mind here. In Mk.10:45 Jesus speaks of His death as a ransom (Gk. lutron) and here Paul uses the word "substitute-ransom" (Gk. anti-lutron). The emphasis is on how Christ stood in our place, died our death, and paid our penalty. It was a glorious exchange, perhaps best understood if we think of Barabbas looking at the Cross and saying, "I should have been there." Think of the familiar hymns:

"There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin:" (C.F.Alexander)

"He, to rescue me from danger, interposed His precious blood." (R.Robinson)

"My Saviour's obedience and blood hide all my transgressions from view." (A.M. Toplady)

"In my place condemned He stood, sealed my pardon with His blood." (P.Bliss)

Christ made peace by the blood of His Cross (Col.1:20) because He met the consequences of sin, not only in respect of human guilt because of broken law, but also in meeting the wrath of an offended God whose righteous majesty had been insulted by sin. God is implacably opposed to all that is evil. His wrath is revealed against it (Rom.1:18ff) but we are saved from wrath through the only Saviour, Jesus (Rom. 5:9).

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2:7

The testimony in v.6b seems to refer to God's testimony, His declaration to man of His desire and power to save. This God made plain, spelling it out clearly, when He sent His Son in the fulness of the time (Gal.4:4). But this message has to be made known to the whole world, and to this end Paul was appointed a herald (preacher) and an apostle (commissioned and sent with God's authority). It seems Paul was aware of those who would deny his authentic calling as an apostle and he adds the affirmation, "I am telling the truth". Perhaps Timothy was the kind of man who tended, almost in spite of himself, to be influenced by the criticism of discontented believers. Paul's whole ministry was certainly dogged by these pestilential characters whose main Christian activity seemed to be that of denigrating ministers and their ministry, regardless of the evident fruits. It may be that his affirmation here is more attached to the following words about the gospel ministry to the Gentiles. There are always those who want to "keep in" the gospel rather than send it out. The only way to confront the lies that vex humanity is by open statement of the truth. This was Paul's commission and his passion (Rom, 9:1-3;10:1; Gal.1:6-12, 15-20). But note how fully he described his ministry. He was the herald under orders to proclaim the message (not to invent it). He also had the authority of an apostle and was to be listened to, because he spoke in Christ's name. He was also the teacher in the realm of faith and truth.

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2:8-15

We must go through this passage verse by verse, recognising it is difficult to understand and to apply, and that it can raise very heated feelings. The whole section 2:8-3:15 is dealing with the life of the church and its work and witness in the world. We must remember that the church is judged by the world according to its corporate witness and not just by the life and integrity of individual believers. The first thing Paul mentions (linking back to v.1) is prayer, and the basic leadership men must take in this fundamental area. It is a fact of experience nowadays that in many (most?) places Christian men leave the praying to the women, and this is a denial of spiritual calling, The pattern of the church in every place must be the spiritual leadership of the men. They must take the main burden of prayer, especially, for example, at the beginning of the prayer-meeting and so make it easier for the women and the

younger Christians to take part. But right through the time of prayer the men should be aware of and alive to their responsibility, not obtruding or taking over or praying for everything in one long prayer so that others are left not knowing what to pray for, but leading graciously and so encouraging prayer. Paul does *not* say that only the men should pray. But that raises questions beyond this present study. In 1 Cor.11:4ff,13ff it is by no means clear what the "covering" is and we had best not be dogmatic. Remember that the form of worship in N.T. times may well have been more like our Bible Study-Prayer Meeting than the more structured Sunday services.

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2:8-15

Note in v.8 the clear instructions which refer more to attitude in prayer than just posture. At the same time, posture can indicate an attitude of lazy indifference, casual participation rather than earnest commitment. There is in fact no stated position obligatory for prayer and we must simply see to it that we do not hinder ourselves or others. Certain actions in prayer can become a distraction, as Jesus made plain (Matt. 6:5-6; 23:1-7) and lead to hypocrisy. In Paul's words here the lifting up of hands (which can serve to draw attention to self) is far easier to observe than making sure the hands are holy! Clean hands and a pure heart are the requisite for engaging in prayer (Ps.24:3-4; Matt. 5:23-24; Isa.1:15-16). Paul goes on to emphasise the need for an attitude that is without anger or quarrelling. Anger towards others is a difficult thing to handle (Jas.1:19-20) and is seldom productive of good. It is best put away (Eph. 4:31). The word disputing is related to the word dialogue and some translate it dissension or reasoning. It may signify a calculating attitude that is more concerned with self than with God (Lk.18:11) and more inspired by law than by grace. It may even have an element of doubting. The second half of our verse may then refer to the need in prayer for purity self-ward (holy hands), peace man-ward (no anger) and faith God-ward (no doubting). Remember, God looks on the heart and, considering His gentle forbearance to *us*, why should we be angry with others? Remember the story of the two debtors (Matt. 18:23-35).

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2:8-15

Paul now turns his attention to the place of women in the church and he refers first to appearance, not to function or activity. This is natural, because it is appearance that gives us our first powerful impression. This is true in the social realm. Appearance speaks very loudly and first impressions tend to be hard to modify. So, when unbelievers come to church they do not first ask for a copy of the constitution and doctrinal basis, they simply look at us, men as well as women, and they judge by what they see. Appearance, bearing and behaviour are good indications of what we are at heart. "Paul was shrewd enough to know that a woman's dress is a mirror of her mind" (Guthrie). There is no criticism of attractiveness in Paul's words but there is a correction of the worldly attitude to clothes which can be sheer indulgence, a desire to outdo others, a spirit of rebellion or a deliberate intention to be provocative. Clothes are not irrelevant and in an age that becomes increasingly exhibitionist we need to give more attention than we do to all that is said in the Old Testament books of the Law about dress, with the emphasis on modesty and seemliness. We must view with concern the contemporary trend in the world that seeks as far as possible to obliterate the God-ordained distinctiveness of the sexes. In like manner there is an alarming tendency in the conversation we engage in and the familiarities we allow in behaviour. We must see to it that as Christians we are not being moulded into the fashions and attitudes of the world. This is serious.

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2:8-15

Far from denigrating, devaluing and displacing women, Paul is recognising their powerful influence for good or evil and he does so by driving his argument right back to the beginning of history in the Garden of Eden. But note first v.11-12. You can do only two things with such a statement: accept it and order the life of the church by it, or else erase the verses from the Bible. This verse seems clearly to forbid the ordination of women to the eldership or the ministry and no amount of quoting Gal. 3:8 can change what has been the almost unchanging practice of the church throughout history. To say that Paul was speaking simply to the circumstances of his own generation is to open the way to a manipulative re-writing of the whole Bible whenever it says something that does not fit in with

modern ideas. Granted, different opinions on such issues as these are sincerely held and care must be taken to compare Scripture with Scripture. But at the same time we must face up to the stark and radical statements made by Paul if we believe that all Scripture is God breathed (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). Some say that since there are equal opportunities for women in worldly professions, why not in the church. The answer is simple: the church is not the world and it lives by different principles. Again it is said we must keep up with the world, but if the world is going further and further away from God why should the church follow it? Sad to say the organised church seems to be following the world in the casual attitude to marriage, divorce, morals and even in the justifying of the so-called "gay" marriages. This, and much more, is what happens when we refuse to bow in submission to God's ordained pattern for life.

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2:8-15

We are dealing with contemporary issues and we must be willing to think about them. Paul is not despising women nor is he denying the basic equality of the sexes. He is teaching that they differ in function and that this is the pattern of God's will from the Creation onwards. The man is the head of the woman. Read 1 Cor. 11:3-12 and 1 Pet. 3:1-6, remembering also that when the time came God sent His Son, born of a woman, without the instrumentality of man. There can be no devaluing of woman and no "lording" it over woman. Indeed, if a man does not know how to treat a woman rightly there is something wrong with his Christianity. The pattern is Christ (Eph. 5:21ff). Of course, if men refuse to be true to their manliness in Christ and do not take responsible leadership then they are distorting God's order and there will be consequences in families and churches as well as in society. Paul takes us back to the Garden of Eden and shows that "in the most important situation in which she (woman) was ever placed, she had shown she was not qualified to take the lead" (Barnes). In that story it is plain that the Devil was active. He deceived the woman and, drawing her from her rightful function as Adam's helpmeet, caused her to be the instrument of introducing disorder into God's order, with terrible consequences. One commentator points out that Eve was deceived but Adam sinned with open eyes, to keep her company, ceding his right to rule.

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2:8-15

In this detailed study, by no means exhaustive, we have sought to show the Biblical teaching of the order of the sexes, headship for the man and submission for the woman, but in a way that is complementary not competitive. There must be no refusing of God's calling, nor a grudge against God that He has not dealt with us differently. People say, "What of women on the mission field?" There are exceptions to God's rule in unusual times, for example Deborah who had to take the lead over Barak (Judges 4:1-9). The modern situation of the mission-field, greatly populated by women, may signify that there is a vast number of Christian men who are living out of God's will because they should be missionaries. God will not allow His work to be held back by human failure. In v15 it would be a brave commentator who would pronounce on such difficult words. Some see a very veiled hint as to the "birth of the child", being the promised seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15). Some see a link with Heb. 13:4 and an emphasis on the value of human relations within the plan of salvation. Some see a reference to woman in her womanly role with all her influence for good as custodian of purity and morals. Some see reference to the travail of childbirth as being woman's equivalent of man's travail in work, both being the consequences of sin. But both experiences can be, by God's grace, stepping stones to fulfilment. But fulfilment through motherhood is no comfort to the unmarried. Some quote, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." But the verse ends with references to four graces, and who better than women to manifest these? A gracious woman, gladly accepting God's will and way, is a blessing beyond measure in the church and in the world.

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3:1

This one verse has a lot to teach. With the ending of the apostolic age provision had to be made for the consolidation, continuance and shepherding of the church. It was not to be left to its own devices but was provided with elders and bishops, that is, presbyters and overseers. Right from the start in his missionary work Paul had been

a planter of churches and had seen to it that elders were appointed in every place (Acts 14:23). In his farewell to the church at Ephesus he had called the elders together and had outlined their responsibility to guard the church which belonged to God (Acts 20:28). In Titus 1:5-7ff the terms elder and bishop seem interchangeable and in 1 Tim. 5:17 it is clear that some elders were set apart as teachers of the Word and this, along with such passages as Eph. 4:8-12ff., makes it plain that there were in the early church those we now call "ministers". Paul's words here, emphasising the sureness of the saying, may indicate that already there were some who disparaged and devalued the pastoral office, and this attitude is still with us today. It is not a spiritual attitude to think that we can grow in grace and truth without the supervision, discipline and instruction of faithful men to whom this task is given by God (2 Tim. 2:2). This being so, we need to set a high value on the office of the ministry. A superficial reading of the verse seems to indicate men who were "ambitious" to be ministers and who put themselves forward for the office. This is not the way to the ministry (Heb. 5:4; Jer. 45:5a). Nor is it the attitude of God's great men (Ex. 4:1; Isa. 6:5; Jer. 1:6; Amos 7:14). It is the nobility and the privilege of the office, together with its responsibility that Paul emphasises.

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3:2-7

Before considering in detail the qualifications for the eldership, think of the vows our own C.of S. ministers make on their ordination. "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 motive and chief inducement to enter the office of the ministry?" Following upon that, comes the question: "Do you engage in the strength of the Lord Jesus Christ to live a godly and circumspect life; and faithfully, diligently and cheerfully to discharge the duties of your ministry, seeking in all things the advancement of the kingdom of God?" It is indeed a noble and demanding task and that is why Paul goes on in such a detailed way to outline the qualifications to be looked for in any man who is to be set in the office of bishop or elder. The standard is high. Consider Paul's own attitude to his work and also Peter's exhortation to elders (1 Pet. 5:1-5). It is an abiding temptation, having once been given position in Christ's church, to use that position for authority rather than service; for place and privilege rather than example; and to fall into the error of setting high standards for others while excusing ourselves. This was the snare the Pharisees fell into. Elders must lead by example, and that example stems first from what they are in spiritual and moral integrity, and only then by their words.

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3:2-7

Paul's concern for the right ordering of the life of the church is deep and detailed, and has a sense of urgency about it (3:14-15). He knows that leadership is important because it sets the tone of the whole fellowship. Now, as we approach Paul's serious words regarding the standard of life called for, we must remember that whether in the eldership or in non-official positions, the solemn challenge must be set in the context of the amazing privilege it is to be in the service of Christ and His church, however costly. There should be a spirit of glad eagerness and enthusiasm no matter the nature of the task (Acts 5:41; Rom. 12:7-11; 1 Cor. 9:19-22). But enthusiasm is no substitute for integrity, and the man who is to serve well as an elder, overseer or bishop, must be above reproach. If not, then the church and its Lord will be slandered. Was Paul thinking of Ezek. 36:20-23; cf. Rom. 2:23-24? To be above reproach seems an impossible standard. After all even Jesus was falsely accused of wrong. But think of our Lord's challenge in John 8:46; Samuel's challenge in 1 Sam. 12:1-5; and the confession of his enemies in Daniel 6:4-5. To be above reproach is not to be blameless, else all of us would be forever disqualified. It means to walk in the light with God (1 John 1:5-7), to be open-faced with nothing to hide (2 Cor. 3:18), and to be manifestly the kind of person who will have nothing to do with what is shady or suspect. Such a one is in the clear (Eph. 5:7-16).

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3:2-7

Read along with this passage Titus 1:5-11 noting the similarities and also the more extreme form of some of the qualifications. The phrase "the husband of but one wife" clearly set a standard of monogamy in a society where

some had more than one wife. This is an issue now on the mission field. No Christian is allowed to have more than one wife and it may have been that a man who, before his conversion, had been a polygamist was barred from the eldership even though now his situation was regularised and he had only one wife. In the a-moral society of our day it certainly bars from office any married man who has "extra-marital" relationships. Does this regulation prohibit from the eldership and the ministry a man who has been divorced and remarried? We have heard of a visiting preacher from America who arrived with his third wife! What does this say to the world about the sanctity and life-long nature of marriage? Some say this regulation simply requires that an elder should be a married man. Was Paul himself married? It seems best to take this second qualification to refer to a man's conduct of his relationships. His loyalty to his wife must be manifest and worthy, so that all know he is not a trifler with other people's affections, and therefore that is a man who can be trusted.

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3:2-7

The next three qualities: temperate, self controlled (sensible RSV) and respectable (dignified RSV) or well-behaved all seem to refer to the testimony of the man's way of life as others observe him. Keeping in mind that these men are to bear rule in God's house the qualifications are seen to be quite basic. An elder is to be temperate (Titus 2:2) or well balanced, not given to excess of any kind in his mental, emotional, physical or moral habits. Such a man, by his influence, will tend to subdue "tempers" and moderate attitudes. The elder must be "sensible" or self-controlled, discreet and not liable to be swayed by sudden impulse. He will not jump to conclusions in dealing with people or when meeting new fashions of doctrine or practice (Eph. 4:14). The elder must also be "dignified" or well-behaved, knowing the kind of bearing that different situations call for. He must not be rough or uncouth but rather courteous and well mannered, because to be otherwise would dishonour the King whose servant and representative he is. He would also arouse resentment and make gentle discipline all the more difficult. Even at this stage the standard seems impossibly high. But since Christ dwells in our hearts by His Holy Spirit there is no reason why we should not all grow more and more like this, growing in grace and in knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18), more and more fashioned into the image of Jesus (Rom. 8:29). If we feel our failure and limitation the reaction should not be to contract out and to refuse to serve. It should bring us to a fresh surrender and commitment to God in willingness to be fashioned into a useful servant of Christ and the church. The great Potter still re-makes the vessels (Jer. 18:1-4).

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3:2-7

When we come to the theme of hospitality we must recognise that this is the calling of every believer and every fellowship, as well as the duty and qualification of an elder (Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:1-2; 1 Pet. 4:7-10). The word "hospitable" signifies a "friend of strangers" and this serves as a correction to the tendency to open our homes and our hearts only to those who are our particular friends and to those who "appeal" to us. It was not because of our personal "appeal" that Christ died for us. He came to us when we were strengthless sinners (Rom. 5:6-8). In apostolic times there would have been few big houses or rich families to provide a "harbour" for the traveller or the lonely, and many believers would feel their loneliness in an alien world very deeply, especially if they were the only one converted in the whole family circle. In a lonely world with so many rootless people there is a tremendous need for hospitality, allowing people to come into the family and treating them as family. There is no need for extravagance of food or attention, just kindly care and a willingness to listen, "A heart at leisure from itself, to soothe and sympathise" (A.L. Waring). Of course, hospitality must not be presumed upon. Nor must it be restricted totally to formal invitations. We must be the kind of people others can drop in on at times. But there are times when hospitality has to be refused. Read 2 John 7-11; Rom. 16: 17-18. But read also 3 John 3-8. Many a Christian can testify with feeling, "I was a stranger, and you took me in" (Matt. 25:35). Of course some are particularly gifted in the matter of giving hospitality and others live in circumstances that make it almost impossible.

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3:2-7

The seventh quality in an elder or bishop is an aptitude to teach, but this does not necessarily mean a capacity for preaching, although 2 Tim. 2:1-2 seems to go in that direction. Of course, we need teachers of doctrine but we also need teachers of practice, procedure, administration and loyalty. In whatever way God has gifted a man he must exercise that gift wisely for the good of others (Rom.12:3ff; Eph. 4:10-16). Not all are given the task of preaching (1Tim. 5:17) and not all are equipped to counsel, but all who are elders must be ready and able to stand guard over God's flock and show them the way forward (1 Cor.4:14-17; 11:1; Philip. 3:17). We teach by example as well as by word and must guard against the error of the Pharisees (Matt. 23:1-2). The best, indeed the only way, to be a teacher is to be teachable and the man most aware of being still a learner is the man whose words are wise and most likely to be in accord with God's truth. It is good for all of us to be reminded also that we need to be careful whom we listen to. Not all who seem and sound spiritual are safe to follow. There are false prophets, bad influences and wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15; Acts 20:29). At this point (v.3) we are introduced to a set of qualifications couched in negative terms, the one positive word "gentle" being inserted by way of a contrast. Before studying them we need to remind ourselves that the Christians of the apostolic church were not perfect and had been converted to Christ out of worldly and sometimes degenerate lives and circumstances (1 Cor. 6:9-11; Eph. 2:2-3; Gal. 5:16-21; Rom.13:12-14). What trophies of grace they were! And some of them were now elders in the church.

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3:2-7

Note what prospective elders were warned about. They must not allow themselves to be brought under the power of drink, anger, an argumentative spirit or money. Paul is very clear about the potential of human nature and we all do well to take these cautions seriously, no matter how liberated or balanced we may think we are. There is no doubt at all that the effect of wine or strong drink is to ease the restraints that normally guide our behaviour. It is only a step to the attitude of challenge and confrontation, whether by words or fists, and the elder must not be this kind of man. It is the "chip on the shoulder" attitude, belligerent and looking for trouble. But the elder must be "not quarrelsome", however sorely tried. He will yield his rights and suffer wrong (1 Cor. 6:7) even though he will not compromise in respect of truth or principle. But remember, it *is* possible to speak in a gentle conciliatory tone with the set objective of annoying, hurting and even enraging. This is perversity, and Christ has no part in it. An elder must be like Barnabas (Acts 4:36) or Jonathan (1 Sam. 23:15-18). How different from these is the person who delights in setting people at odds with one another. Finally, no man can be a true servant of Christ and His people if he is preoccupied with money and all it signifies in terms of possessions, power and ambition. Jesus made this very plain in Matt. 6:24; Lk.16:10-15, and Paul emphasises it again in 1 Tim. 6:6-10. Few can handle wealth safely. Its influence is subtle and dangerous and we need to keep close to Jesus in order to keep the balance.

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3:2-7

What a standard is set for ministers and elders, and indeed for the witness and service of every believer. Our spirituality is tested by our ordering of family life (5). If a man is neglectful, unreasonable, inconsistent, over-demanding or over-lax with his own family how can he possibly be fit and able to watch over God's family? The words used here do not warrant any form of harsh domination but rather speak of the discipline that stems from grace. Rigid strictness and weak laxity are alike excluded, for the first forgets the child's identity and personality and the second forgets his need for instruction, restriction and guidance. We need to go to Eph. 5:21-6:9 for elaboration of this theme. The strictness that is enjoined on the head of the family is that of love and of manifest understanding and care. If children begin to feel they are denied identity, that their thoughts and opinions are discounted as a matter of course, that they are merely the instruments for the fulfilling and projection of their parents' ambitions and prejudices, and that they are not valued for themselves, then there will be disorder. Each in the family, the human and church family alike, must be accorded a rightful dignity; there must be no favouritism or foolish comparisons; and regardless of personal affection, where there is wrong done there must be discipline

exerted. It all begins at home. If we cannot there be the kind of person whose discipline is naturally and graciously recognised and accepted then we cannot rule in God's house.

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3:2-7

We must not weary of these verses because they are full of teaching. If v.6 is needed for an elder whose work is often routine and demanding, how much more is it needed in the contemporary evangelical world where new converts are pressurised into public prominence on platforms, regaled with praise, and treated as "mini-messiahs". Such babes in Christ, who have not proved themselves and who often never do, end up pronouncing on all manner of issues of life and doctrine. Such become puffed up in a cloud of over-estimation, and become unreachable and unteachable. If a man is to bear rule in God's house, let him be a man whose progress, dependability and stability have been proved. The issue is not just whether the man is capable of doing the job, but whether it is safe for him. Can he stand the prominence without being proud? Can he be trusted with Christ's gracious power and authority without becoming selfconscious and feeling that he is "a cut above" the rest? It is so easy to grasp at leadership in order to gratify a lust for power, and such a man loses sight of the fact that he is only a servant and, of himself, has nothing to give. He may have a great opinion of his own spirituality but in v.7 we are told he must be well thought of by those outside the church and the faith. Can worldly people assess the spiritual worth of a believer? Yes! They can be most perceptive.

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3:8-13

Having studied the standards set for elders all of us would cry out, "Who is sufficient for this?" But this is no reason to contract out, because our sufficiency is in Christ (2 Cor 2:16b;3:5AV). There is no reason why we should not rise to this standard by the power of the life of Jesus within us by the Holy Spirit. Of course, not all are called to be elders. Paul speaks now about deacons, and he does so in very similar terms, making it clear that the work of the deacon, though different, is not in any sense less valued. It is a false attitude and it signifies that all is not well in a man's soul if he is ready to do "spiritual" service but not to do the down-to-earth practical business of the life of the church. The earliest reference to deacons is in Acts 6:1-6. Although the word "deacon" is not used there in its official sense, it is the word translated to "serve" tables. There are many other references to "serving" in this general and often humble and demanding work. The work of the deacon is essentially administrative, but it is holy work, and without the right men to do it the life, work and witness of the church are hindered. If the deacons do not do their God-given work rightly then the men whose task is to minister the word are prevented from doing that. This shows neglect of duty to be a serious sin. Right from the start there were elders and deacons in the church (Phil.1:1). Right through the Bible there is a glorious emphasis on "serving" (deaconing) in a general capacity without an official title. Why do we so often want to be recognised and appreciated? Is it not enough to be bond slaves of Jesus?

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3:8-13

Read 1 Pet. 4:7-11, noting the reference to rendering service (deaconing) and emphasising the objective, which is to glorify God in every thing. Note in 1 Cor. 16:15 the reference to serving the saints. In 2 Cor. 4:1; 6:3 the same Greek word is translated as referring to ministry. In 2 Cor. 8:4 it is translated "sharing", and in 2 Cor. 9:1; 12-13 the word service is used in relation to the offering of money to help other believers in different places. In Heb.1:14 the angels from God's presence are sent forth to be working servants in the interest of the heirs of salvation. There are many more references, but these suffice to show that the work of a deacon is a glorious and comprehensive work with its own spiritual value, even if its practical expression is scrubbing floors or washing feet (John 13:1-11). This being so we are not surprised by the standards set for those in the official position of deacons within the congregation. These officers of the congregation must be serious because they are handling things that belong to God. They must not be double-tongued. Going from house to house they must not indulge in tale-bearing, saying one thing to one person and another thing to the next person, thus causing confusion and suspicion. To this there is

added the temptation of being offered wine again and again, and since the deacons were in charge of the offerings and gifts of the people there would come the temptation to pilfer from the funds in their charge. How important it is not to put people into positions where they will be exposed to temptations that are too strong for them.

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3:8-13

It is important that there should be no undue haste in appointing men to office. Let them be given time to prove themselves and then let them serve. Of course mistakes happen and we can be deceived. Never forget that none of the Twelve were suspicious of Judas right to the end, and he who was trusted with the funds of the disciples was not trustworthy (John 12:6). This takes us back to the word sincere (double-tongued AV/RSV) and makes us think of how easy it is to be "spiritual" in spiritual company but totally worldly when in that kind of company. Such people have as their main concern a desire to be popular and acceptable and therefore they are adjustable. They cannot be depended on. If a man or woman lacks this grace of consistent dependability then that person is not suitable to hold office in the church. The deacons must also be men of faith and conviction (9). The deep truths of the faith (mystery AV) does not refer to some "secret" experience or initiation but to the fact that the salvation of God, once hidden, has now been made plain. Of course, it is discernible and recognisable only to faith. This is a theme Paul speaks of often with wonder in his heart (Rom. 16:25-27; Eph.1:3-10; 6:19; Col.1:26-29; 4:2). In such a stewardship or service as deacons Paul urges all, himself included, to have nothing to do with anything shady or unworthy (2 Cor. 4:1-2). This seems to be the emphasis of a clear conscience (9). It has to do with walking in the light and having nothing to hide from God or men (1 John 1:5-7).

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3:8-13

It is difficult to decide who the women are the wives of the deacons who should be worthy partners with their husbands, or women constituting a separate order of deaconesses. They may even be the equivalent of what was once called "Lady visitors", working alongside both elders and deacons in the different sections of the congregation. Without doubt there are areas of pastoral care best carried out by women but, says Paul, they must be a certain kind of women, serious, worthy of respect; not malicious talkers; temperate and not given to extremes of reaction; and faithful in all things. The last phrase could read "absolutely trustworthy" and is a caution against the sin of searching out information you do not need to know, and have no right to know. There is also an emphasis on the sin of passing on and prattling about other people's affairs. That this is a serious matter is clear from the fact that the word used for malicious talkers or slanderers is actually "diabolos". The uncontrolled tongue is indeed a devilish and hellish thing as James 3:1-10 makes so plain. After just one verse referring to the women, Paul concluded his requirements for deacons with a reference to their domestic situation in much the same terms as for elders. Then, in the last verse, he adds a word of encouragement, whereas the counsel to the elders ended with a warning about the snare of the Devil. Perhaps our closing thought today should be in terms of 1 Peter 5:1-9.

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3:8-13

Verse 13 is hard to understand but it does seem to be a word of encouragement to both men and women called to the more lowly work of deacon rather than the work of ruling or teaching elder. The context rules out the idea of the office of deacon being used as a training ground or stepping stone to a "higher" office. It seems rather to say that the people who carry out their appointed task well, even though it be a lowly one, receive their reward or good standing with God and man. Crowns of glory are not reserved for the talented public figures only. It would be natural for Paul to bring together costly service here on earth with glorious reward in heaven. He does so in a wonderful way in 2 Cor. 4:16-17. The world to come will make sense of a lot of what happens here and now. This meaning accords with the translation that reads, "They that have used the office of a deacon well purchase (acquire) a good degree" (AV). In the process of dealing with our God-given stewardship we are all becoming certain kinds of people, and character is the one thing we carry with us into eternity. Some say the verse indicates that faithfulness brings both opportunity and capacity for godly influence. Certainly it brings esteem in the eyes of

the church, the world and God Himself. People of real spiritual worth and manifest dedication exercise an influence far beyond what they are aware, not least because all they do carries with it a sense of confidence in the faith of the Gospel. Influence is a by-product of character and a life lived in faithfulness to God will be good for others.

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3:14-15

Right through chapters 2 and 3 Paul has been speaking of the life of the church in the world. He is fully aware that it is only as the heart and life of the church are in good health that the work and witness of the church will prosper. He has spoken in detail of the qualifications of the office bearers in the church and now he deals with the nature and character of the church. All that we have been studying has its application to the individual believer and we must always put great emphasis on the life and witness of the individual. But the life and witness of the church is more than the sum total of the witness of individual Christians. The church, as the church, is the body of Christ in the world (1 Cor. 12:27) through which Christ in His person, work and purposes is expressed. The church is spoken of in the letter to the Ephesians (the congregation of which Timothy was minister) as the dwelling place of God (Eph. 2:19-22). The Lordship of Christ over all things is in the interest of the church (Eph. 1:20-23), and the gifts of the risen Christ are for the building up of the church (Eph. 4:11-16). The emphasis is on the one-ness of the church (Eph. 4:3-6) and on the essential unity and inter-dependence of all companies of believers who are, and should be, gathered into recognisable "congregations" duly constituted in terms of doctrine and discipline (1 Cor. 1:2). We shall see in the next verse that there was, from the start, a clearly defined and required doctrinal basis in things that were of the substance of the faith. All this needs to be emphasised in a day when there is among some evangelicals such an anti Church spirit and such a proliferation of independent groups who recognise no authority but their own and owe allegiance to none but themselves.

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3:14-15

In these verses Paul seems to be putting down in writing the verbal counsel and detailed instruction already given to Timothy and also making it plain that what is being said is, in fact, normative and determinative for the whole church at all times. The doctrine and practice of the church is not an adjustable issue. Some say we must keep "reforming" the church to keep pace with the changes in the world, but if, as is evident, the world is moving further and further away from God, why should the church follow such a way of folly? Even in the business of structure and methods there is much wisdom in seeking the old paths (Jer. 6:16) and certainly the biblical path. One thing we must get clear is what the church is, and Paul gives a threefold description. It is the household of God. He dwells there, Head of the house, with His sons and daughters by adoption gathered round Him. This is a glorious and yet homely picture, full of comfort and encouragement. In Christ Jesus we are no longer strangers, without identity, living as lodgers with no security of tenure. We are family (Eph. 2:18-19; cf. Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:4-7). We belong, and the most recent convert is as much born into the family of God as the most mature saint, although obviously their function and capacity will differ. The church is not a building but people, gathered together and built together (1 Pet. 2:5). It is not any people. It is God's people. And they are God's by His own choice (Eph. 1:4; Deut. 7:6ff.).

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3:14-15

If we are God's people we must behave in a way that is worthy and this is how Paul secondly speaks of the church (Eph. 4:1; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:12). It is God's church, not ours, and it is His by right of redemption (Acts 20:28). It is the church of the *living God*, not a monument to a dead God or a shrine for dead idols. Think of how the gathered company of believers in Ephesus would thrill to think of themselves described in this way in a city dominated by the great shrine to Diana (Artemis) (Acts 19:28). These believers were the "ecclesia" of God, gathered out of the world and gathered together in Christ, and as the "ecclesia" of God they were entrusted with the care and administration of God's affairs in the world. This concept would be readily understandable to the people

Paul was writing to because most cities had their secular "ecclesia" (town council) administering the city's affairs. This indicates a great sense of privilege as well as responsibility. The church consists of the personal representatives of God in a lost and dying world. These "sinners saved by grace" are God's ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20) and, as God's church, they must be like a city set on a hill (Matt. 5:14) shining as lights in the darkness (Phil. 2:15) and acting as signposts, pointing men to Christ and calling them to family fellowship in salvation. Take time today to think of the living, active, ever-present, all-knowing and all-powerful God, who works all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11), who brings to completeness all He begins (Philip. 2:6) and whose assurance is perfect in every way (Rom. 8:29-30).

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3:14-15

The third description of the church is as the pillar and foundation (bulwark) of the truth. This does not mean that the truth of the gospel and of Scripture *depends* on the church. God is, and God has spoken, and His truth stands by its own validity. Indeed it is only because God has spoken that there is a church. Paul's emphasis here is different. He is speaking of the church as a pillar holding up the truth for men to see, and as a bulwark defending and preserving the truth from generation to generation. The church is true to itself and to its calling when its whole life is ordered to make it a testimony to the truth of the Gospel as it is in Christ. We must never forget that preserving the truth for the next generation is every bit as important as proclaiming the truth in this generation. This means that true evangelism must be teaching evangelism, and that doctrine is of vital importance. The most obvious things about the church should be its hold on the truth of God as it is in Scripture; submission to the truth in all its life and order; service of the truth in proclamation; and the full content of the truth in all its ministry (Acts 20:20,27). The test (if that be the right word) of every gathering for worship should be, "How much of God and His Word was there in it?" This has little to do with the length of a sermon because length can be a hindrance and distraction as well as a help. It has everything to do with ministering the truth in terms of bringing the Word of God and breaking it as the bread of life to feed the hungry people of God.

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3:16

There are many "three-sixteens" in the Bible which are mines of truth (John 3:16; Mal. 3:16; Dan. 3:16-17; 1 Cor. 3:16; Col. 3:16; 1 Jn. 3:16; Rev. 3:16) and this one is no exception. Paul speaks of the surpassing grandeur of the Gospel which "mystery" God has made known so gloriously in His Son. Great indeed, by common consent, is the mystery of godliness (AV and NIV), our religion (RSV and NEB). It is the staggering story of the working of God's costly grace whereby Christ died for the ungodly (Rom. 5:6); whereby God, through the foolishness of preaching saves those who believe (1 Cor. 1:21); the mystery whereby God chooses the foolish things of the world to confound the mighty (1 Cor. 1:27); the dynamic of saving grace whereby bad men are made good, dead men are raised to newness of life (Eph. 2:1; Rom. 6:4) and the chief of sinners made the greatest of the apostles. Read Rom. 3:10ff, 21, the picture of guilty sinners estranged from and opposed to God, and under His wrath, followed by the amazing words, "But God". Read the same contrast in Eph. 2:4 and 1 Cor. 6:9-11. Let our hearts be subdued yet thrilled as we consider this salvation and say, "Why me?" Some we grew up with and who were under the same influences are still in darkness and unbelief. They heard the Word but it did not profit them (Heb. 4:2). It is a mystery indeed. Every conversion is a total miracle, the sovereign working of the Holy Spirit through the Word bringing us to Christ, calling us effectually, not just inviting us. Is not the testimony of each of us this: "While I passed my Saviour by, His love laid hold on me."

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3:16

The mystery revealed is God's activity in grace right down here on earth for the salvation of men through His Son Jesus Christ. The theme of the verse is the glorious gospel of the blessed God (1:11) but before studying its detail think of how this theme of mystery revealed or uncovered is spoken of in the New Testament. Here the emphasis is on the Incarnation of God coming down in Person. In Eph. 3:4-6 it is the Gentiles being brought into the privileges

of grace. In Eph. 5:25-32, it is the church as the Bride of Christ. In Rom. 11:25 it is the place and significance of the Jews in the out working of the history of salvation. In 1 Cor. 15:51 it is the abolition of death and the final consummation of history. In 2 Thess. 2:7 it is the mystery of iniquity (AV), the operation of evil in the affairs of men and nations, showing God's control, limitation and judgment of evil. The revelation of the mystery of God's working is the source of wonder and worship, and we all need to enlarge our thinking historically and geographically so that in faith we will be able to cope with the rapidly changing and developing situation. In one sense we are spectators, viewing the vast panorama of God's active operations. In another very real sense we are partakers, not just because we are involved in the outworking of the plan, we are in fact God's instruments. Great indeed is the mystery. And the half has not yet been told.

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3:16

There are six doctrinal statements here and scholars say the verse is a quotation from an ancient credal hymn of the church. Imagine a great company of believers singing these mighty statements. Think of how our own traditional Christmas and Easter hymns are likewise theological affirmations of the truths of the Gospel. It seems certain that a previous verse of the hymn spoke of Jesus Christ, and now comes the declaration that He was manifested in flesh. One Christmas carol speaks of Him being veiled in flesh, but here it is an open exposure in which the eternal Son of God is made flesh among us (John 1:14). The phrase speaks of the pre-existence of Christ in the glory of the Father before the worlds were ever made (John 17:5). He is indeed the glorious Christ spoken of in Heb. 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-23; Isa. 9:6-7 and in Col. 1:27. Paul speaks of the "mystery" of this very Christ dwelling in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. What a glorious gospel indeed! God sent His Son and thus we have a mighty and powerful Saviour not only near us but within us. Think what Spirit dwells within you. But more: this Saviour took upon Himself full humanity, being made like us, and tempted like us in all points so that He understands and sympathises perfectly in our every experience (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15). Whatever our situation or experience today He knows and He cares.

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3:16

It would be easy to rush through these phrases with a few brief devotional comments but that is not how to study the Bible nor how to consider Christ in a way that is worthy. The phrase justified or vindicated in or by the Spirit seems to refer to how the Holy Spirit testified to and authenticated Christ in all His life, even though He was despised and rejected by men. Time and again the Spirit caused men to testify to who and what Jesus was. "Never man spoke like Him ... Even the waves obey ... He spoke with power, not like the Pharisees ... Truly this was the Son of God." Some say the phrase refers to the vindication of Jesus and His work of atonement in the fact of the resurrection as Paul states in Rom. 1:4. Some say it refers to the whole of Scripture which testifies to Christ, as He Himself said (Lk. 24:27,44). Peter also refers to the testimony of the Spirit in the Old Testament prophets (1 Pet. 1:10-12). Jesus was vindicated in the sending of the Holy Spirit as He had promised (John 14:15ff, 25ff), and all through the life of the church the Holy Spirit carries out His appointed task of bearing witness to Christ. Where the Spirit is freely active the emphasis will be on Christ and His work, not on the Spirit Himself. The Holy Spirit is an enthusiast for Jesus, especially in terms of teaching His disciples from Scripture (John 16:14). This is the thrill and challenge of Christian witness. As believers hold up Christ to be seen, the Holy Spirit authenticates that witness. Christ stands pre-eminent (Col. 1:18) and people are drawn to Him (John 12:32).

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3:16

The phrase "seen by angels" seems to take us to a heavenly standpoint from which to view the facts of Christ and His work of salvation. The angels round the throne worshipped God and veiled their faces from His glory (Isa. 6:1-3). Did the angels look on the glory of the Son? Were the angels of God stirred in awe and wonder when God sent forth His Son, down into such a world as this? They certainly seem to have had some idea of the amazing thing that was happening when they took their part in the developing story of the conception and birth of the Saviour, and they sang "Glory to God". Jesus spoke of legions of angels awaiting His word of command. (Matt. 26:53) and the

gospels record how angels ministered to Him at specific times (Matt. 4:11). We do well not to laugh at the idea of guardian angels. There are many things we cannot see but which are very real. Hebrews 1:14 is a verse full of significant comfort. The angels of God must have viewed the silent, secret resurrection of Christ and they certainly participated in the ascension (Acts. 1:10). In Eph.3:10 the glory of salvation is made known to what seem to be the unfallen principalities and powers, and in 1 Pet. 3:19 there is the suggestion of Christ in His triumph being made known to the fallen spirits in the whole world of angel beings. Whatever the full meaning of the phrase, we have indicated something of the sweep of thinking in the early church concerning the ramifications of the work of Christ. We should think likewise.

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3:16

Christ is "preached among the nations" in a way that breaks barriers of race and class, proclaiming the message of hope and salvation with glorious assurance. There is no other name given whereby men might be saved (Acts 4:12). Jesus alone is the way to the Father (John 14:6). He is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him (Heb. 7:25 AV). Paul himself thrilled to this fact. He preached Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2) and he was not ashamed of the Gospel (Rom.1:16). Think of Jesus' command: "Go into *all* the world make disciples of *all* nations *all* power is given to Me I am with you *all* the time". Think of the old hymn, "Send forth the Gospel, break the chains of sin." Think of the urgency. Think of the need, as people die in their sins. Think of the final victory when ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands beyond that are gathered in the glory of God (Rev. 5:11). But over against that think of the tragedy of the times of the reduction of the work on the mission field. Lands opened up to the gospel by costly endeavour in the past now languishing in gospel ignorance. Why should this be so? Is it because the church has been beguiled away from preaching Christ and Him crucified? Think of the world today in all its darkness and need. The fields are white unto harvest, but labourers are few (Matt. 9:37; John 4:35). The voice of God still says; "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Isa.6:8).

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3:16

In the midst of the ongoing work of the church, very aware of the difficulties and disappointments, we must never forget this fact: Christ is being believed on in the world. It may not be in our part of the world, and on the face of it our church may not have any apparent success. But the work is going on. Faith comes by hearing and people hear when Christ is preached (Rom.10:13-17). This is a miracle, because the Gospel is a stumbling block to many (1 Cor. 1:23). It is the message of a supernatural salvation which cannot be gained by merit or good works. It slays the innate pride of self-centred hearts and in that sense is offensive to natural-born sinners. Yet it is the power of God and the agent of faith. There is no thrill like discovering that yet another person has come to saving faith. And, if there is joy in heaven over one sinner coming to repentance (Lk.15:7), what must the reaction in heaven have been on the day of Pentecost when three thousand came to faith after one session of preaching! Of course, it is not just a case of hearing and agreeing, but of believing and being disciplined, and that involves repentance. We cannot have Christ and our sins. Read Acts 3:17-26; 17:30; 26:20. All will not believe, but the unbelief of men cannot prevent Christ's final triumph. That is never in doubt, for He was taken up into glory, and sits at the right hand of the Father. To Him every knee shall bow (Phil. 2:9-11). His enemies will be His footstool (Heb.10:13). He is the Man by whom all will be judged at the appointed day (Acts 17:31). In every sense, the Lord is King!

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4:1-3

The great gospel declaration we have been studying these past days is not a complete doctrinal statement because there is no actual mention of the Cross and Resurrection. But it is still a marvellous affirmation, calculated to encourage and inspire both Timothy and his congregation, and a wise way to bridge over in this epistle from teaching about church order and discipline to the theme of opposition, contradiction and difficulty. Paul first declared the truths that cannot be shaken, affirming that the foundation is sure (2 Tim. 2:19). The work is God's and Hell cannot prevail (Matt. 16:18). "The work which His goodness began, The arm of His strength will

complete. His promise is Yea and Amen, and never was forfeited yet." (Toplady) We face dangers not in weakness but in the strength of the Lord and the assurance of His victory. We will never be able to fight the good fight well unless we learn first how to stand, what we stand on, and what we must expect to meet. We must never be taken aback by difficulty, opposition and persecution from unbelievers. The world in which we work and witness is not neutral. It is totally geared in opposition to God and prefers Satan to God (1 John 2:15-17; 5:19). We must also be ready for the more subtle and dangerous opposition that arises from within the church, from those who appear to be "spiritual", and we must be doubly on guard against the influences of those who seem to be "extra spiritual" and who often claim to be particularly led by "the Spirit". Before we go further, read and ponder 2 Cor.11:12-15.

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4:1-3

Note how aware Paul was of those who were claiming spiritual leadership, exercising influence, and undermining his own authority as an apostle of God. Note also how specific he is in making plain that they were inspired by Satan, not by God. We are not told of the specific time and place when God's Spirit uttered this warning and it may be that Paul is referring back to the teaching of Jesus in, for example, Mk. 13:21-23. The missionary apostle was very aware of this danger and warned the elders at Ephesus about it in Acts 20:29-31, urging them to become well grounded in Scripture, because that is the only safe ground. It may well have been that some of the original elders, appointed by Paul himself, were now leading the church away into spurious spirituality. It is a solemn thought. Remember that this congregation was already in possession of the epistle to the Ephesians. They knew the teaching about principalities and powers (Eph.6:10ff), but in practical terms they had not yet learned it. They were in the process of being beguiled away from basic doctrinal truth (1 Tim.1:19-20) by those (possibly converted people) who were giving heed to or devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and doctrines or teachings inspired by demons. This evil work was not being carried out by the Devil in terms of hideous and convulsive outbursts nor in terms of gross immorality, but in terms of subtle seduction. The people going astray were beguiled to the point that they thought they were going forward into new realms of spirituality. Would they listen to the words of the man who had been the instrument, under God, of their salvation and progress in the faith? Some think it is spiritual to go against the way of their own church, and they are secretly proud of it. That indicates the "spirit" that is at work.

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4:1-3

We believe in the Devil, and we believe in demons. We believe in their activity, their oppression of believers and at times in their taking possession of people's lives. We also believe that much of the talk today about demons and exorcism stems from "Christian paperbacks" rather than from Scripture, and much of the talk and practices of exorcism stems from the world of spiritism rather than from apostolic pattern. There is in many quarters a preoccupation with demonology that reaches the point of obsession. Too many counsellors and practitioners who claim to be experts in the subject of demons put forward demon-possession as the first and only diagnosis of a difficult situation, when in fact the explanation is to be found on a physical, emotional, psychological or spiritual level. It is not without significance that it is in our generation that is so preoccupied with charismata and demonology that there is also a significant departure from and lack of interest in Biblical doctrine and teaching. There is also a clear devaluation of the doctrine of the church, a refusal of discipline and duty alike, and a significant lack of candidates and money for long term missionary service. Is it not true that the dominant element in many Christian lives is pleasure and that too many are willing to be guided only by their own subjective experience? Too often the phrase, "I feel led by the Spirit" is the weapon used to end all discussion. If, as Paul warns Timothy, the Devil can sidetrack the work of the Kingdom by this means, he will not need to use the method of persecution.

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4:1-3

As we go on, note how as early as this in the history of the church, there is in existence a clear and established body of truth and practice. This is why it is possible to speak of those who swerve away and depart. Consider Rom. 6:17; 16:17; Eph. 4:14; 2 John 9-10; Heb. 13:7-9. In this context Paul uses very strong language in v.2, and this is understandable if he sees the danger of the truth being so corrupted that generations to come will be left to grope in the half-light of a mixture of truth and error. We in our turn must see to it that our children after us and their children in turn are provided with a church that is grounded in and living by the truth that does not change. From Paul's language it seems he is not excusing the false teachers because they have been beguiled, but rather suggesting that it is because they were hypocrites and liars that they were drawn into the clutches of the Devil in the first place. He goes on to say that these people (men or women or both?) have no sense at all of the wrong they are doing because their consciences are cauterised and have no feeling. That means they can neither be reasoned with nor warned. They are totally and blandly confident in their own assumed spirituality. But note also that Paul seems here to be speaking of something that has assumed the dimension of a "movement" within the church, not just the lapsing of a few rather unstable and misguided souls. It has to be challenged, exposed and opposed, in the interest of truth. At this point Paul becomes very specific and makes plain that these heretics, by the inspiration of the Devil, were propagating a false holiness and spirituality. This must be examined.

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4:1-3

The theme of false prophets and teachers runs right through the Bible (Jer. 14:13-14; Acts 13:6, 8), and their technique is best illustrated in the parable of the Tares and the Wheat (Matt. 13: 24-30). Seeds are sown and the crop that grows seems very like the real thing at the beginning. It is only as it develops that its falseness becomes apparent. So it is here. The false teachers were propagating a "special" way of holiness by way of celibacy and fasting. These two disciplines were said to be *the* marks of the truly spiritual person, and of course this would lead to a cult of "superiority", which is pride, not holiness, because the focus is on self not on Christ. Paul had already challenged this false, man-inspired, man-centred holiness in Col. 2:20-23, making plain that it was a glorification of self rather than a denial of self. How subtle the Devil is and how easily we are deceived! We will sometimes do anything, however sore and costly, if only it draws attention to self. The man who will not eat (on the pretext that his thoughts are on higher things) will by his very gaunt look make himself the centre of attention. The person who chooses to withdraw from right and lawful relationships to dedicate himself to holy living will, by his ghastly loneliness, have everyone running after him. The person who will not buy decent clothes (because he "gives all" to the Lord's service) will guarantee he is always the focus of attention. Jesus had searching words about this in Matt. 6:1-6,16-17. When our sanctification becomes self-conscious it is no longer done for Christ. When holy living becomes bondage to a set of selective rules instead of a life of loving obedience and fellowship, something has gone far wrong.

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4:4-5

Those who were forbidding marriage were in fact going against God's ordinance since it was God who instituted and blessed marriage (Matt.19:4-6; Heb.13:4). There is nothing base or evil in the marriage relationship, just as there is nothing essentially evil in the body and its necessary appetites. These heretics were insisting that "matter" was evil and, of course, this led inevitably to a denial of the Incarnation in which God Himself took on fleshly nature for our salvation. Of course, what is good in itself can be distorted and used wrongly, and we must see to it that we maintain a truly Christian attitude to the whole business of life and all its activities. God is a generous God (1 Tim. 6:17) who in Christ gives us all things (Rom. 8:32; Eph. 1:3), and who is a pleasure-loving God (Ps.16:11). But we can be so taken up with God's goodness and gifts that we forget Him and this must be guarded against (1 Cor. 6:12; 7:31). There are also times for specific self-denial in respect of legitimate things in order that for a time there might be a free-er and more radical availability for Christian service. But even then, there must be wise balance because the Devil is always seeking to confuse and complicate and so to hinder the work (1 Cor. 7:1-

7). We are in danger when we try to be too spiritual. After all, God remembers we are but flesh (Ps.103:14) and we also must remember our humanity and its limitations.

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4:4-5

In the whole of this opening passage "The question at stake is that of our whole conception of God. Are we to think of Him as grudging us our earthly life, or are we to find in it a continual proof of His presence and goodness?" (Scott, quoted by Guthrie). When God created the world He declared it all to be very good (Gen. 1:31). The problems stem from the fall of man and the corruption of his nature, as Jesus made plain (Mk. 7:1-2, 14-23). Even in the faith of the gospel we can lose sight of this and try to be holier than God, as Peter had to learn (Acts 10:14-15). Jesus spoke of giving men life to the full (John10:10) and the Psalmist speaks of feasts and rivers of pleasures (Ps. 36:7-9). Of course, there are the pleasures of sin, which are as costly as they are temporary (Heb.11:25) and there is the temptation to be lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God (2 Tim.3:1-5). Where then is the safe way for us to walk? Paul speaks of an attitude of thanksgiving which fixes the heart on God (Col. 3:16-17); a desire for and submission to the Word of God which has sanctifying power (John 15:3); and a spirit of prayer which signifies not just thanksgiving before meals but a life-style in which we naturally and sweetly draw near to God because we want to be with Him and to please Him. The child looks up to the Father to see if He is pleased and approves. If the light of the Father's countenance shines on us we are blessed indeed (Num. 6:24-26).

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4:6-10

Paul now addresses himself specifically to Timothy the minister and his on-going ministry, and we must study his counsel in detail. It is a constant temptation in the ministry and in all forms of Christian service to preserve our own personal position in doctrine and practice so that we cannot be accused of being backsliders. At the same time we can be tempted to keep quiet in the specific area of our service so that we do not disturb people or draw their anger and enmity. There are ministers who certainly believe the Gospel, who rest in Christ for the salvation of their souls, who believe in judgment to come and in everlasting hell, but who never preach these truths to their own congregations. They may in fact preach them when at conventions or other gatherings where such preaching is expected and draws praise. They may also state their position in conversation with other evangelical ministers and laymen and so maintain their reputation as sound. But it is so easy to keep quiet in the face of the congregation, community, workplace, golf club, Parents-Teachers Associations or the like. This is both compromise and double-dealing. Paul makes plain to Timothy that if he points out these truths and principles enunciated in the first three chapters before the brethren then he will have shown himself a good minister of Christ. Paul is urging rather than just suggesting this kind of teaching ministry, but his words do not have the sense of challenge or command which comes later in v.11. It could read "submit" these things to the brethren, your fellow believers and especially the elders, and the word carries some of the idea of laying down stepping stones through a marsh. Paul knew this congregation, its dangers and distractions (Eph. 4:14; Acts 20:29-31) but he knew also that there were genuine souls wanting to be taught and led.

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4:6-10

A "good minister" is one who not only lays before his people the truths they need, rather than just the ones they want, but a man who himself is nourished, fed, vitalised and always being trained by the words of faith and good doctrine. He who would teach others must himself be taught continually, and any minister who stops learning, who stops delving into the Word for the good of his own soul, who stops wanting to be ministered to when the opportunity is given him, will soon dry up and be of little use to his congregation. It seems clear from v.6b that there was already in existence and use a formulated body of doctrine regarding the fundamentals of the faith which was to be followed as a standard, cf. Rom. 6:17. On this basis there follows the radical exhortation to have nothing to do with godless and silly myths which seem to have been having a run of popularity among the Christians in Ephesus. However spiritual these off-beat ideas seemed to be, Paul insisted that God was not in them. He also

described them as "old-wives tales", which may have started as reasonable biblical interpretations but had been embellished, exaggerated and distorted until they were contrary to God. The descriptive phrase "old-wives" may indicate that women were the instigators of this false spirituality, but the phrase equally applies to some men whose desire to impress leads them into all manner of exaggeration.

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4:6-10

Paul's injunction to get into training in godliness recalls his vivid words in 2 Cor. 9:24-27. He was not urging on Timothy anything he had not first done himself. He recognised that taking care of our bodies is important, not least because our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). This means there must be discipline of time, diet, sleep, relaxation and work. But if half the effort many expend on physical wellbeing was to be spent on the cultivation of spiritual life, the difference would be world-shaking. If the time and enthusiasm we spend on human friendships was equalled by time spent on cultivating our relationship with God we would be quite different people in terms of both Christian witness and satisfaction. Of course, all training takes effort, time and discipline and it must also have some clear objective in view. In Heb.12:1-2 we are called to abandon hindrances in the interest of the race set before us, the clearly marked out will and plan of God for life and service. In 2 Cor. 5:6-10 we are told of effort expended in the dominant desire to please God and to stand happily before Him on the day of judgment. In Phil. 3:12-15 we are shown the pattern of life that presses on to the prize of our high calling in God. Here in Timothy we are told that spiritual discipline is full of promise for this life and the life to come. It is promise that does not let you down. In living the life that pleases God the Christian takes possession of the best of both worlds. But the careless and those bound up in false asceticism live in bondage and lose out in joy, peace, happiness and hope.

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4:6-10

It is difficult to decide if the "saying" in v.9 refers to v.8 or v.10. It certainly is a faithful saying that Christian life, although it is all of grace, is nevertheless a life of hard work and effort. There are no easy ways to holiness, service or success. Paul has also exposed the false idea that withdrawing from the world and its legitimate activities is the way of holiness (v.3). Even in a secluded desert cell we would find that the temptations of the world, the flesh and the Devil were still with us. We live in a world atmosphere that is not neutral (1 John 2:15-17) and our human nature is not neutral (Eph. 2:2-3). The answer is not bodily exercise to try to knock sin out of us, although a realistic ordering of life and habits certainly helps. The fight of faith is to stand by faith in the victory Christ has won for us in His death and resurrection. It is a victory over sin in its guilt, sin in its power, and sin in its source and continuing accusation and troubling, namely the Devil. Our hope is in God's salvation. We stand in Christ believing we have indeed died unto sin *in Him*, united to Him. This is our salvation. All His victory has been given to us, and in faith we stand in victory (we do not battle towards victory) and we mortify, put to death, the flesh, refusing to let sin have dominion over us (Rom. 6:14). This is what it means to live in the power of the world to come (Heb. 6:5) and it is the basis and blessing of life here and now. What a Gospel! What a life! What a thrill!

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4:6-10

The picture in v.10 is of the believer living his life with his eyes and heart set on the living God whose saving power is known far and wide among all people of all races and of all time. There is no suggestion here that everyone will be saved and go to heaven. That is made plain by the added reference to "those who believe", indicating, as experience and Scripture testify, that many will refuse to believe and will die in their sins. It is always sobering to be reminded of the elemental division between believers and unbelievers, a division that becomes apparent in the attitudes and motivation of life here in this world and is confirmed, continued and projected in the world to come. Think of the disturbing words of our Lord Jesus Christ in Jn. 8:21, 24. It is not for nothing that we sometimes sing, "Rescue the perishing, care for the dying ...". Paul's emphasis here seems two-fold. He speaks of God as Saviour in the sense of His being the preserver of all people. His providence is indeed

sovereign and His sun shines on the just and the unjust (Mat. 5:45). There are many benefits in this world shared by all. God is the God with whom we all have to deal. We have no option. Even those who do not believe God exists still have to deal with Him because God is, and our very breath comes from Him (Dan. 5:23). The other emphasis seems to be in respect of the particular situation Timothy faced. Salvation is not for some "elite" who are the "initiated" into the secret way propounded by the heretics. There is only one Way and one Name for salvation. It is Jesus.

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4:11-12

Timothy, a young minister who tended to be uncertain about himself, especially in a congregation where many or even most may have been older than himself, is counselled not only to teach sound doctrine and practice, but to do so with authority and firmness. This does not mean the young man had to be brash, or dictatorial. Even when exposing error there is no need for a spirit of denunciation because, after all, the aim is to recover the erring one, not to drive him into a siege position in which he will not listen to pleadings or instruction. Of course, a minister's authority is not in himself, his talents or even his Christian character. It lies in the two-fold fact that he is called and ordained by God for a specific task (in respect of which he will be judged on the great day), and that he ministers a message that carries with it the authority of God. Preaching and listening to preaching are not pastimes nor hobbies. They are dealing with God in the context of eternal issues. Paul is aware of Timothy's self-consciousness about his youth, although the actual word used could signify anyone up to about forty years of age. But the Ephesian church had had Paul as its minister and there may have been those, perhaps even some of the elders, who had a mighty regard for Paul (Acts 20:36-37), who felt that the "new" minister was a bit of a novice compared to themselves. Spiritual pride on the one side and a fearful, inhibiting spirit on the other could have led the congregation into a wilderness of disaffection. The Devil would have loved that. Paul showed the way forward.

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4:11-12

In order that his ministry would not be hindered Paul counselled Timothy to win the confidence and respect of the congregation. When a man's spiritual integrity and basic humility are manifest people will listen to what he says, even though by reason of youth his actual experience of the rigours of life is less than theirs. Young men who have never lived through a world war or through years of depression and unemployment must be careful not to speak as if they knew it all. Timothy was called to manifest graces that are not by any means common to youth. His speech, in tone and content, must commend itself. He must not be a babbler, nor in his preaching must he plague his congregation with a weary monotonous voice. Why should the living words of God, (the lively oracles of God Acts 7:38 AV) be presented so drearily that they are as unattractive as a plate of cold porridge? Football supporters and political pundits "feel" what they are saying. Why should preachers be different? The young man's conduct, bearing, appearance and his manifest valuation of people as people, together with his willingness to work must also be seen. All this will happen only if the inner qualities of love, faith and purity are there. A man's ministry is determined by what he is. The love spoken of is love for God and love for man. We must care for people as people, whether or not they are believers and whether or not they care for us. A minister must love the loveless for that is how Christ loved us. But that will not be unless faith is fixed on God. Both love and faith can be hampered by impurity.

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4:13-16

In 3:14 Paul indicated his intention to visit Ephesus and this is now confirmed. To have Paul with him would be a great support, but no doubt Timothy, in common with many a young minister, would be more than a little apprehensive about the possibility of Paul being in the congregation! You are never sure who will be in the congregation (God will be there), and that should help preachers to get down to the discipline of preparation. Give good attention to the public reading of Scripture because if you have not prepared properly the congregation will know it at once. It is the minister's business to help the people to understand God's Word (Neh.8:1-8) and so to

break the bread of life that all kinds and ages of people will be fed. After prior preparation, the Word of Scripture is to be read to the congregation, and followed by preaching and teaching. There must be application as well as proclamation. This is important because preaching can become, for both preacher and hearers, something of a performance to be enjoyed or be impressed by or even be diverted by rather than a dealing with what God is saying. The word "teaching" has to do with making plain the doctrines of Scripture regarding both faith and morals, and these two go together. What we believe and how we live are of basic importance. These counsels of Paul's are of great significance in our day when preaching is being discounted and Bible study has given way in some places to "praise concerts" and the like.

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4:13-16

If we keep in mind that v.14 is addressed to a young minister in a particular situation in order to encourage him to get on with his God given ministry, we will be kept from building up a "doctrine" from one single verse regarding the "gift", "prophecy" and the "laying on of hands". At the same time we must remember that God does call and send and ordain specific men for the work of ministry and, in calling them, He equips and enables them. Think of the call of Moses (Ex. 3:10ff.), Jeremiah (Jer.1:4ff.) and Paul himself (Acts 13:1ff.). Timothy was reminded of his call to the ministry, and of how he was in fact a man marked out by God by unmistakable signs and seals. Right from the beginning there was clear prophetic utterance regarding God's call (1:18). Just how this prophecy came we cannot exactly say. What we do know is that it was a call recognised and confirmed by the church acting as the church. It was not a unilateral unexamined call. No one has the right simply to "take up" the ministry. God must make His will clear and then the presbyters (elders), acting as a duly constituted body, "ordain" God's man. The whole exercise emphasises that the "office" of the ministry is a gift and the capacity to fulfil that ministry is also a gift of God's grace by His Spirit. It is not a matter of human talents but of God-given capacity. This being so, the human side has a great deal to do with hard work and discipline so that the "gift" will not be wasted, cf. 2 Tim. 2:15.

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4:13-16

Timothy is to carry out the various duties mentioned so that they become a natural or instinctive part of his attitude to life and service. Note that they are "duties" and therefore may not be qualified by feelings or inclinations. A true sense of duty can be a great blessing and a release from all sorts of tensions and distractions. It also makes a Christian a dependable kind of person. What a blessing a real "worker" is in a congregation. Of course, the example of a worker should be the minister and that is why Timothy was urged to be diligent or think deeply about these duties and to devote himself to them. Duty and devotion go together. Cold duty, so manifestly calculating and so often grudging, is a repelling thing and should have no part in a real Christian life. There must be warmth, the warmth of love and gratitude to the God who has blessed so richly and who has privileged so greatly in allowing us to be His servants. But again, it is to the minister the charge is addressed. He must be so given up to and absorbed in his life of ministry and service that his progress will be manifest to all the congregation. It must be "his true Christian development and not some lesser thing such as brilliance of exposition or attractiveness of personality" that must impress people (Guthrie). To progress in popularity is not the same as to increase in usefulness, and the snare of popularity has brought many a promising ministry to a premature end. Popularity is the mark of false prophets. Jesus said so (Lk. 6:26).

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4:13-16

A fourth and final day on this passage emphasises in v.16 the challenge, motivation and objective of all our service. Everything is set in the context of salvation. This is the eternal issue. The person who would serve in the Gospel must take heed to himself, that is in terms of moral rectitude and also in terms of the message he speaks and preaches. It must be an inner integrity, not just formal rectitude. And if "hidden wrongs" are there, then our life becomes a hindrance and a resistance rather than a conductor of the Gospel (2 Cor.4: 1-4). Just think: our handling

of the Gospel can rob it of its power and those who should see and hear it are left with only a vague impression rather than

a clear light. Paul exhorted Timothy to be in earnest, because only then would he save himself and those who listened. "He will not only be working out his own salvation (in the sense of Phil. 2:12), but will also be assisting others to do the same. The danger of neglecting one's own salvation is greater in the Christian minister than in others, and even the apostle Paul himself could fear lest he became a castaway after preaching to others (1 Cor. 9:27)". (Guthrie) A minister or any Christian with a dried-up soul is not much use to anyone. Indeed he is a hindrance. We need not go dry, no matter the demands made on us, so long as we stay at the fountainhead. Consider Song of Solomon 1:6b; Isa. 58:10-12; John 15:1-5.

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5:1-2

The section from 5:1-6:2 is concerned with discipline within the Christian fellowship and its instruction is largely concerned with how to treat people. This is important on a number of levels, including the harmonious life of the believing fellowship and the witness of that fellowship in the world. The church in Timothy's day lived in a world of disappearing moral standards and ruthless self-interest, just as the church does today. That being so, the church, as well as individual believers, must show that there is a way of life different from that of the world, a way of life totally tenable and workable, in which people are valued as people and treated with dignity regardless of age, education, talent, wealth or poverty. The church is a colony of heaven on earth (or it should be) and its way of life must be distinctive, refusing to be squeezed into the mould of the world (Rom. 12:1-2). Note in this first verse how all ages are gathered together into the one congregation, not sectionalised in the way that has become habit in our generation. These people had been converted to Christ from every social background, Jew and Gentile, slave and freeman, rich and poor, but they were now all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28) in a way that required barriers to be broken down (Eph. 2:14). The Jews with religious tradition must not be allowed to feel superior. Gentiles with a "fresh" attitude to the eternal Gospel that had broken in on them must not be allowed to think they had arrived at total knowledge. A "big business man" recently converted must not assume that he would automatically be a leader in the church. Timothy had a problem congregation and the experienced pastor advised him.

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5:1-2

Whoever you meet at church, make sure you treat them all with the respect due to men and women for whom Christ died. Any attitude or action that devalues or demoralises (and Christians can be ruthless, even graceless; but is a graceless person really a Christian?) is hateful to God. Any sense of human or spiritual superiority is a denial of Christ, because apart from Him we are nothing at all. What is looked for here is the grace of good manners and this eliminates all that is boorish, offhand and moody. Of course it is not sentimentality and it does not pretend all are perfect saints. The young Timothy must recognise that some older men were not being and doing what they should and this had not to be overlooked. They must not be allowed to run the congregation. But they were not to be dealt with in the way a rebellious teenager might be "dressed down", whether in public or in private. The older man is to be respected (Lev.19:32) and granted a degree of deference simply because of age. He has lived through many more hazards than the young man. But age is not to be equated with spirituality nor granted infallibility. Of course, the older you are the harder it is to change. This is why age must be exhorted or entreated rather than rebuked sharply. The word for exhort is the same as for "paraclete", one who is called alongside to help. There is all the gentleness of a true ministry of grace in the word, and it reminds us of our Lord's dealings with us in all gentleness and patience. It is easy to condemn. To restore and save is much harder. Throwing stones is not a Christian activity (John 8:7).

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5:1-2

The positive gentleness referred to yesterday reminds all who feel they have a ministry of "correction" that the objective is restoration to full function (Gal. 6:1-3). If we have been given power or capacity, then it is in order to

be servants of others rather than to be ministered to ourselves (Mk.10:35-45). This means we will not "lord it" over even our own age group. To "boss" people is not the same as to guide them, and to correct is not the same as to point out how wrong they are. To accord the younger men equality is right, for they are as precious to God as any. And, if they in turn are Christ-centred in their attitude, no wrong familiarity will ensue and they will be willing to be taught and even corrected. The attitude to older women is important because to correct or counsel them is not easy. What son can easily suggest to his mother that she is in the wrong? It makes you go to God in prayer not least so that what is necessary might be said with the utmost grace. "Honour your father and mother" is a commandment that stands. Note finally how wise Paul is in counselling the young minister with regard to his pastoral dealings with the young women. Let there be no appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22 AV). Remember that Jesus met the immoral woman out in the open in full daylight (John 4:6ff). There must be no compromising situations; no trifling with affections; no wrong familiarity in word or action that might suggest that the minister has an "interest" other than strictly pastoral. So much hurt and confusion can arise from unwise actions and words that indicate affection. It can be misunderstood. Remember also that there are wicked young women who are far from innocent (Gen.39:6-20).

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5:3-8

In the family of Christ we are all equal in status, accepted only by grace and having nothing except what has been given (1 Cor. 4:6,7). But at the same time we are individually different in function. We do not expect the old to be young (mutton trying to be lamb) nor do we expect the women to be men (even when the men settle for being mere males). Without doubt in the early church there were whole families converted but the domestic group cannot and must not take the place of the gathered group which is the church. And in the church family there were, and are, widows. Some may have been left well provided for, but the widows referred to here were those in distress and need. Now, while the fellowship must care and share, Paul makes it plain that the first responsibility here falls on the children and grandchildren. This is not to be thought of as a harsh imposition but as a prime religious duty. It is done unto God, and it pleases God. It is also a moral duty to make some return to parents for a lifetime of service to the family, often at sacrificial cost. It is an ominous sign in our generation not only that family unity and loyalty is disappearing, but that responsibility for aged parents is so quickly passed on to the state, and any restriction of a family's liberty or pleasure is resented. There are many factors to be allowed for - housing, finance, a daughter's exhaustion or a mother's impossible selfishness and manipulation. But who knows when the younger ones may themselves be the ones in need? Remember God is the God of the widow (Ps. 67:5; Ex. 22:22-24; Deut. 24:19-22; Lk.7:11-17).

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5:3-8

When Paul wrote these words it seems a fact that widows, by the sheer pressure of circumstances, were sometimes turned to immoral lives in order to provide for their needs. It is clear also that Paul refers here to widows who were believers (5). The church, as the church, cared for and provided for such who were in need (Acts 6:1-6) and James makes plain that this is a realm in which real religion is manifested (Jas.1:27). But the church must not be expected to do what is the duty and privilege of the children. Nor must children make "spiritual" excuses to escape from looking after parents (Mk.7:9-13). There can be a certain glamour about travelling the world to look after the needy, but it can be sinful to do so if our real responsibility is at home. Note, of course, the spiritual mindedness of the widow and how that is contrasted with some whose way of life had become totally self-indulgent. Note also the radical statement of v.8. A person's faith, conversion and commitment is put to the test in terms of providing for one's own family, not just in the business of caring for widows in need, but in the continuing provision appropriate to one's place in the family. It refers to fathers who neglect family life; to mothers whose other interests make her unavailable for husband and children; and to children who do not take their rightful share of duties and responsibilities. Christianity is disturbingly practical. To be really heavenly minded results in being a great deal of earthly use.

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5:9-16

In this section, which is difficult to understand, Paul is dealing with widows in respect of their work in the church rather than with their needs. The reference to enrolment (put on the list) may suggest something of a clearly defined, official group. The over sixty age barrier indicates work that rightly and naturally belongs to women of mature years and experience who, by the fact of being widowed and left with children to bring up, would have a realistic attitude regarding the practicalities of life. This does not mean those older women who have not been married and widowed are excluded from spiritual service. They too, by the demand of loneliness for example, have had opportunity to learn deep spiritual lessons which make them useful to others. Some, whatever their circumstances, never really learn the lessons God is teaching them. That is why there are such exhortations as in Heb.12:5-11; and 2 Pet. 1:5-11. There is no suggestion in Paul's words that he is forbidding widows to re-marry, nor criticising those who do. But there seems to be a clear kind of service in his mind (we cannot be sure what it was) for which the qualification is an acceptance of widowhood, with all its soreness, as a call from God to service. The qualifications for such a task (10) are high and are not things learned just since the beginning of widowhood, but graces which have been manifest in the person's life and service consistently throughout life. The picture is of women, not any longer in their first youth, who were willing workers, giving themselves freely, and going on in glad service year after year. Such women are a glorious asset to any congregation and Paul goes on to compare them with other, younger women, who prove to be temporary enthusiasts with no staying power.

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5:9-16

The exclusion of the younger widows from this specific list (whether it refers to need or to service) is couched in strong language and seems to refer to the possible clash between vows of service and human fulfilment. Paul may be thinking of some who take up a piece of Christian service to "fill a gap" in their lives at a time of emotional hurt, denial or deprivation. Such motivation is suspect. It can bring an unbalanced and unhealthy element into the work, and it is by its nature temporary. When the hurt is healed and the need no longer felt, the interest in the work can disappear. This does not deny that our kind God does in fact, at times, provide a context for comfort and healing in this way. But we must be careful, especially when selecting people for specific tasks. On a slightly different level some engage in certain kinds of work and go to gatherings because it is the best place to get a Christian partner. The "dedication" can be simply a means to an end. We need clear thinking in these matters. Paul's words in 1 Cor. 7:25-35 should help, provided we do not insist that he advocates celibacy for all. To return to our passage, we must see the danger of making spiritual decisions as a reaction to emotional hurt. A broken romance, for example, does not constitute a call to the mission field, but if that course is followed it may well land the mission field with a problem rather than a helper. The young widows referred to, seemingly without children but feeling a need to be needed, are not the people fitted for the specific, public Christian service in question (whatever that service was). Paul goes on to give several good reasons for his words.

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5:9-16

It seems the young widows did not want to be tied to church duties if opportunity for marriage came. Paul's concern is not that they wanted to be married, which, after all, is a God-ordained state as he makes plain in v.14. Compare his rebuke of false ideas in 4:1-3. These widows had taken on an official task, regarded as long-term, and bringing them into the public eye in society as well as in church. To contract out simply to get married seems to have been something that even secular society at the time would have misunderstood (14b). Paul speaks of going back from Christ and breaking their first pledge for service. Remember that the atmosphere in Ephesus was conducive to all manner of indulgence and that all those in the church had been converted to Christ out of a grim infected background. Paul may be insisting here that converts have to prove themselves and he may be thinking of the words of Jesus, "He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved." Paul may not be questioning their conversion but simply recognising the facts about their personalities when he states the consequences of going back on a commitment to Christ. He speaks in v.13 about becoming idlers, aimless drifters, gossips and meddlers. Their lives are negative and their influence destructive. Having started on the way of self-fulfilment (denying vows

in the process) they became self-indulgent, and it seems some had yielded to the temptations of the flesh and were living immoral lives. To be out of the will of God is a dangerous condition, especially if you are still engaging in Christian activity. There is a Devil, and temptation and opportunity may come at the same time. Watch and pray.

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5:17-18

If it is a solemn thing when young widows contract out of their commitment to service, going back on their vows, how much more is it the case when elders go back from their spiritual commitment and when ministers contract out of their calling to be ministers of the Word and pastors of the people. But the obvious theme of these two verses is not challenge or warning to the elders but rather counsel to the church. They are to see to it that those called to serve God in the ministry of the Word are provided for in a way that is worthy, a way that will set them free and enable them to do their God-appointed task. It is a task which carries with it solemn responsibility as well as privilege and brings a stricter judgment (Jas.3:1). Being well provided for, the writer of these notes is free to draw the attention of many evangelical Christians in other congregations to the fact that they do not provide for their ministers in a way that is in accord with Scripture. Why should Christians expect of ministers and missionaries a level of self-denial and financial sacrifice greater than they set for themselves? Why should missionaries in so-called "faith" missions so often receive only a portion of their monthly allowance? Why do some evangelical congregations feel it is their spiritual duty to keep their minister on the lowest possible wage? Is it to safeguard his humility? Do Christians in other occupations refuse salary increments and perks lest they grow spiritually proud? Paul recognises that some do not rule well. Yes, there *are* lazy ministers whose standard of work is shameful. But when a people have a faithful, godly minister whose work is blessed by God and they do not provide rightly for God's man, then God will call them to account.

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5:19-20

Paul had earlier dealt with the theme of the "maintenance of the ministry" in 1 Cor. 9:1-14. Having emphasised the principle and applied it to the situation faced by young Timothy, Paul now goes on to speak not of the provision for the minister but the protection of the minister and all those elders who were supervising congregations under his leadership. Without doubt, those called to serve in the Word will be the objects of Satan's attacks, particularly through slander. The object of the enemy and his human helpers is to discredit the minister and so to hinder his ministry. This is what they did to Paul, especially people in the congregation at Corinth who thought themselves so very spiritual (2 Cor.10:1,9-10). The lesson today is this: do not be quick to believe what you hear said against ministering elders; rather defend them. But if a matter is becoming a public issue, and investigation by witnesses confirms that the charge is true, then there must be discipline. But note, we are dealing with those who persist in sin. The attitude of the wrongdoer is very important. Often, as Jesus pointed out, matters can be set right in one-to-one personal counselling (Mat. 18:15-17). But where there is no spirit of willing repentance it is a different matter. Again in Corinth Paul had to deal in radical terms with sin among church members (1 Cor. 5:1-5). But he was also the first to recognise repentance and to urge restoration (2 Cor. 2:5-11). Our concern is restoration, not judgment.

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5:19-20

There is such danger in gossip that we consider these verses again. The issue is serious, as Paul's words in 2 Cor.13:1-4 make plain. God's Law made plain the need for witnesses when charges were brought (Deut.19:15-21) and considerable sanctions were set to deal with false witnesses. An effective way to deal with slanderous gossip is to ask people to write it down and sign it so that all might know the source and the terms. The tongue is a dangerous weapon as James 3:3ff makes plain, and people are brought to answer for their speech as Jesus taught (Mat. 12:36-37). Granted discipline can become harsh and heartless as John makes plain, but the neglect of discipline has led to all manner of false standards in the life of the church. Many are filled with resentment if they are even checked or questioned in private about any matter regarding their activity. This is not a good sign, nor is it a Christian attitude. But the point Paul is making here is really about the ruling and teaching elders. Inasmuch as

they are in positions of privilege, leadership and responsibility; and since they are charged to be examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-4); if they persist in sin it is all the more serious and calls for action. After all, the public testimony of the church is at stake as is the credibility of the Gospel. If the impression gets around that the church does not take a serious view of sin, or that the church makes special allowances for elders and ministers who sin, all respect will go, and no-one will listen. Double standards are an offence to God and to man.

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5:21-22

How easy it is to give way to wrong-considerations. We are hard on some because we do not really like them, or because we are jealous of them. We are soft with others because they are friends or because they have power to hurt and hinder us. Timothy seems to have had a tendency to waver in this realm of discipline and leadership and Paul addresses him in a very solemn charge. That it was necessary to speak like this to the young minister is evident from the repeated charge in 2 Tim. 4:1. A minister (or an elder) is not a free agent but accountable for all his actions and influence as Heb. 13:17 makes plain. That reference is addressed to congregations but today's verses are spoken to the minister, reminding him that he must do all things to please God even if everyone criticises him. Neither he nor his work stands or falls according to man's assessment (1 Cor. 4:1-5). However solemn the charge may be there is also an element of relief and release, because Paul causes Timothy to "cease from man and look above thee." When he does this he is reminded not only of God, the judge of all men (Heb. 12:22-23), of Jesus Christ the Saviour, but also of the elect angels, which may refer to the idea of guardian angels (Heb. 1:14). That in turn may have reminded Timothy of the great company of witnesses all urging him to go on in faith (Heb.12:1-2). Timothy needed, just as we need, to think more of the God who not only watches but who works on behalf of His servants, giving more grace (Jas. 4:6) and promising sufficient grace (2 Cor. 12:9). Think of how later on Paul reminded Timothy of how even the seasoned veteran had struggles with weaknesses and fears and had won through by God's grace (2 Tim. 3:10-14; 1 Cor. 2:3; 2 Cor. 7:5). Be encouraged. God has deliberately chosen the weak things of the world (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

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5:21-22

Timothy is now (22) reminded that the running of a church is a shared responsibility, with some called to particular ministry as elders. The reference to "laying on of hands" seems clearly to apply to the ordination of elders, although some see in this verse a hint about not being too hasty in either the disciplining or restoring of wrongdoers. The main emphasis is undoubtedly that there must be no hasty or impulsive appointing of men to the spiritual office of elder. A new status, especially a public one, can change a man. It can go to his head and he may assume that he has "arrived" and he becomes unteachable. Spiritual appointments can expose hidden flaws, and secret dispositions and attitudes can emerge and operate in a way that hinders the work. Think, by way of illustration, how in some courtships standards and appearances can be maintained, but after marriage different attitudes appear, creating divided and even broken homes. In the church, if wrong men are appointed, then leaders are responsible for what these men do. Elders must not be appointed just because elders are needed for administrative purposes. If the right men are not available, to appoint wrong men is folly. The work is God's and we must keep ourselves "pure" by doing only what is right.

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5:23

The previous verse has one more lesson to teach, and it leads on to today's verse. It is easy to over-balance and to be too slow to trust people, to accept them and to restore them when they have gone wrong. We tend to be either too lax or too strict, and this applies to ourselves as well as to others. It seems (23) that Timothy was possibly too hard on himself in terms of self-denial and spiritual discipline. Paul reminds him that it is part of a Christian's spiritual duty to look after bodily health, and that involves right habits of eating and sleeping, and a refusal of the tyrant spirit that drives us on and on and refuses to let us rest. Timothy may have been more temperamentally ascetic than others and that is something neither to be despised nor copied. It is important that we should be

"natural", although Biblical teaching makes it plain that human nature is not "naturally" good. It is fallen and its tendency is to corruption rather than purity. But we are all different in our complex personalities and a regime that is right and beneficial for some may be quite wrong and harmful for others. Timothy may have had reasons for his total abstinence from wine. Alcoholic drink may have been a particular problem in Ephesus. Some elders may have been guilty of habitual excess. It may have been that some were very strong on the issue of abstinence, or it may have been that Timothy felt this was one area where he, being naturally timid, could show strength. It may also have been, as Paul suggests, that contaminated water was contributing to Timothy's persistent ill-health. It is clear that the medicinal use of wine is the immediate subject here, but some general observations will be made tomorrow.

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5:23

At times of celebration, and nowadays every week-end, excessive drinking seems to have become a major social and moral problem, and the consequences that follow are very obvious. In the Bible there are many warnings as to the evil of strong drink, the giving of it and the taking of it (Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35), but there is no specific precept commanding total abstinence. We must recognise that patterns and attitudes differ according to nations, social background and context. We must recognise also that drinking wine with meals may be a different issue from that shown in men, women and young people staggering from pubs and clubs. But think of government warnings about the danger of smoking, and think of the alarm expressed by government and medical authorities alike regarding the misuse of drugs, hard and soft. We heard at a parents-teachers meeting of a child of six in America who was hooked on heroin. Now, statistics declare that alcohol is a greater problem socially and morally than either smoking or drugs. If the principle of example and warning is seen to be a Christian responsibility regarding tobacco and drugs, how much more should it be the accepted Christian witness regarding the socially accepted habit regarding alcohol? Yes, there are other sins such as over-eating, over-spending on clothes, holidays and luxuries, all of which are issues in a hungry world. Certainly they are issues in evangelical circles where there is no money for missionaries. But the issue here is alcohol. Let all be persuaded in their own minds, and let all speak and act honestly. Remember, example is powerful and in many areas, especially that of moral standards, there are people who would take courage if only someone would give the lead. We *are* our brother's keeper. God says so (Gen. 4:9; 1 Cor. 8:7-13).

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5:24-25

"By their fruit you shall know them" (Matt.7:16,20) is an easy verse to quote but it makes us pause to think. Fruit does not appear quickly. Leaves which seem to promise fruit come much earlier but may not be a guide to the true condition of the plant or tree. Some fruit can seem attractive but is in fact poisonous and therefore careful discernment is necessary before we jump to conclusions. Jesus' words in Matt. 13:24-30; Lk. 13:6-9; Mk.11:12-14 have much to teach us, especially when He added that nothing would remain hidden (Matt. 10:26). This is Paul's theme to Timothy as he counsels him so that he would be able to cope with the work of the ministry. As we go on in Christian service there is a two-fold situation that can baffle, hurt and distract. It is the fact of unrewarded goodness and unrequited wrong-doing. What we have to remember is that God is not ignorant. He sees. God is not indifferent, nor is He mocked (Heb. 6:10; Gal. 6:7). His ways are past finding out and at times He seems excessively tolerant of evil (1 Pet. 3:20; Rom. 9:22). But it is always with purpose. The glaring sins that can make us grieve so much may not in fact be the worst or the most damaging to God's work. That is why we must not jump to conclusions. In like manner the moral and spiritual worth of some may not be immediately obvious, therefore we must not be radically influenced by first impressions. We are still in the realm of appointing men to the eldership, and the principles apply to all choices for men and women to take on specific work within the congregation. Remember, God knows, and God is not idle.

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5:24-25

There remains in these verses a lesson that helps to free us from the fretting and strain that can so often beset us simply because we are so earnest about God's work and want it to be the best and to go forward without hindrance. Paul was saying to Timothy to have patience because everything would become plain in time. It is almost as if he was saying that God is not in a hurry. If we have confidence in God as He is confident in Himself then we will not panic and rush to and fro as if things had got out of hand (Isa.28:16). We will learn from God's longsuffering and patience that some things cannot be put right yet, and therefore we must endure them. If God leaves them then they need not be hindrances and can in fact be a means of grace teaching us faith and obedience. Likewise some things are not vindicated yet, and therefore we must wait upon God who is the one who rewards (Matt.10:40-41;1 Cor.3:8). We say so casually, "You'll get your reward in heaven" and that is true (Matt. 5:12). It is also true that reward can be lost (1 Cor. 3:10-15). Again it is true that we can be rewarded openly now (Matt. 6:4 AV). At other times we suffer the loss of all things (Phil. 3:8). There is only one thing to do. Humble yourself under God's mighty hand and He will act in His good and appointed time (1 Pet. 5:6). We need to learn the wisdom of the prayer, "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." That is a good attitude to have. It is the attitude of faith in the living, righteous God.

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6:1-2

The social, cultural and economic situation in which the apostolic church found itself was one in which slavery was an established and accepted fact. Government was military and totalitarian, not democratic, and in the system of law, citizens of Rome had rights that others did not have. The whole system was beginning to creak because of moral decadence, political corruption, religious stagnation and bigotry. Tensions were many, and into this situation came the men of the Gospel who were turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6). It would have been easy to start a revolution in the name of Christ who made men free (John 8:36; Gal. 5:1). But revolution is not necessarily remedy for it has more to do with knocking down than building up. Slogans are not always the same as thought, and the motives of those who clamour for immediate change are not necessarily as righteous and pure as may seem on the surface. Paul was not defending the institution of slavery but simply accepting it as a fact of life that had to be lived with. He was not assuming slavery would go on for all time for he knew the gospel changes society through changed men and women. But Paul was making plain he was not a political agitator aiming to overthrow the system and he had already made plain (2:1-3) that social order is more beneficial to the spread of the gospel than social chaos. It takes faith to accept this, but Christian life is all about faith in the God who works His will in the world. Never forget that it is all too easy to change for the worse as our circumstances change. We may be good Christians when short of money and then lose the place when we "get on". We may be good Christians as ordinary workers and change radically when we get some authority. We must continue this theme tomorrow.

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6:1-2

There are four areas where our Christianity must operate: at home, in church, at leisure and at work. Christian principles can be imposed from outside the situation but it will always be an uneasy regime. On the other hand they can be applied from within, so that the changing attitudes of individuals lead to new patterns of grace in all the relationships of life. It is the principle of leaven, working unobtrusively but dynamically (1 Cor. 5:6). It may take longer to produce results but it is certainly more effective than the confrontation tactics of the present day industrial relations scene. What Paul is counselling here is a specifically Christian attitude to the people we have to deal with in the real situations of work-a-day life. It may seem hard doctrine but it is factual. Within the believing fellowship there is equality before God and there is no room for pride, snobbery or superiority (Jas 2:1-7; Gal.3:28; Col.3:11). But there is a difference, and indeed an inequality of function in the world and in the church (Rom.12:3-4ff). For example, all may be entitled to preach but not all are called or capable. All are entitled to sing but not all are competent to be leaders of praise. All are entitled to care for those who are hurt but not all are medically competent. All are entitled to give advice but some are disastrous advisers. But this recognition of difference in function does not and must not devalue the person. Indeed, it must do the opposite, making us realise just how

much we owe to others and how poorly we would cope without them. Those who lead in worship and prayer would be in a bad way without those who clean and heat the church. If we are "all one in Christ" it should show in a practical way, not least in the expression of gratitude.

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6:1-2

What is our attitude to work and to the bosses we work for? The "yoke of slavery" is a strong phrase for a harsh position in life but those who wear that yoke and who are Christians must regard their masters as worthy of full respect. This is required so that the name of God and the faith of the gospel may not be dishonoured. Think of how the Christian faith is being besmirched today by the strident rantings of many (not only leaders) who hit the headlines. It is not easy to bear the yoke, but Jesus, our example, gave up His rights and took the place of a slave and got very harsh treatment (Phil. 2:5-8). Slaves whose masters are Christians, and with whom they have sat at the Lord's Table, must not assume that this gives them the right to be familiar. Indeed the Christian slaves must be the best workers in every way, because their service to their masters is service to Christ (Col.3:22-24). It is not to be assumed that automatically the leaders of the church fellowship would be the masters. The educated, intellectual and successful men of the world are not necessarily the ones who grow most in grace and spiritual understanding. Some find themselves in executive positions of influence in the evangelical world simply because they are successful in their secular sphere. In Ephesus, and in many places, it may well have been that a slave was the best bible teacher in the congregation because he was a spiritually minded man. How hard it must have been for that Christian to "eat humble pie" back at work with a boss who may have been a problem in the fellowship. Although if it was all that hard, the slave was not as spiritually minded as was thought. A desire to serve is not the same as wanting to be noticed and to lead.

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6:3-5

These verses are introduced by the last words of v.2, "teach and urge these duties". The stern, resolute tone indicates that the early apostolic church was not an ideal church. Nor was it free from difficulty. There were pressures from outside, pressures from the social culture, but most dangerously pressures from inside the church. Some in the church, while not clearly denying the faith, were nevertheless exercising an influence that was corrupting the doctrinal position of the church and producing an atmosphere that was destroying the fellowship. Paul had foreseen this dangerous development and he continued to drive home the lesson. Read Acts 20:28-30; 1Tim.1:3-4; 2 Tim. 2:14,16-18; 3:5-7; 1John 2:19; 2 John 10-11; Jude 4. Doctrine matters, and wrong doctrine leads to wrong motives and wrong behaviour. If it is not checked, exposed and countered then the future of the church is in peril. Note how Paul urged Timothy to teach and lead with authority because he was God's appointed minister, and in consequence the people should listen to the minister. Sermons are not to be voted on and assessed but listened to, because the ministry of the Word is a God-appointed means of grace. Of course, the minister above all must "agree with" or "hold to" the sound words of the faith. He does not have a free remit. He is a servant of and must be subordinate to the Word. If a man's teaching is true to God's Word the result will be men and women who are centred on God and living lives of godliness. This was certainly not the case with those self-appointed teachers whom Paul castigated in such strong language. These people were marked by conceit, ignorance, a compulsive spirit of argumentation, and such an insistence on certain words (no doubt to do with doctrine and spirituality) that they constantly set people in the fellowship at odds with each other. This is confusion and God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor.14:33). It is the other "spirit" that motivates them.

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6:6-8

The final description of the false teachers in which godliness and gain are linked (5b) leads on to today's verses and requires us to think again about what these men were teaching, Some suggest that they were peddling doctrinal novelties bringing forward what claimed to be "new teaching" or "deeper teaching". That kind of thing always appeals to human nature because it gives those who grasp it a sense of being "in" on something special and a

feeling of being more spiritual than others. Such enthusiasts are usually quite willing to part with their money by way of support and that is one reason why off-beat sects seem to have far fewer financial problems than the on-going work of the "ordinary" church. The other reason for popularity is, of course, that false teaching does not call for "death to self" as the true message of the Cross does (Matt.16:24-25). Whatever the exact message of the false teachers was they certainly held out godliness as the way of getting on in life. This may refer to their own high fees for their special ministry, or it may indicate they used their active religiosity as a cloak for the fact that their main concern in life was making money. People still say that if we are true to Jesus we will get on and prosper. But what of dedicated souls under communist regime? It is true that Psalm 1 declares the flourishing of the good and godly man, but Psalm 73 tells of the wicked flourishing. The story of Job tells of a godly man's prosperity, then his total collapse and impoverishment and finally his eventual prosperity. Our times *are* in God's hand and His ways are past finding out. This calls for faith, which is essentially trust, and this is tomorrow's theme.

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6:6-8

True religion does pay dividends but not always in the hard currency of the business world. Some go the way of Christ because it seems the way of advantage by "being in" with certain people. Even some evangelical Christians feel it wise to belong to a congregation where the "right" people go. But the godliness that benefits is much more than simply a form of religion. It has to do with being God-centred and God-managed, and that has to do with being contented. This word "contentment" has an element in it of "self-mastery" and is used in Phil. 4:11 and 2 Cor. 9:8 where it is translated "having all you need". This contentment is an attitude to the whole of life which is detached from circumstances because the heart is gladly persuaded that it is God alone who orders our affairs. Read Prov.30:7-9 and Ps.34:8-10. God can transform circumstances with amazing swiftness when He so chooses. Whether God gives or withholds it is for our good and our blessing. It is the business of faith to maintain a sweet detachment from things and circumstances; not to be engrossed in them (1 Cor. 7:31), but neither to adopt a false asceticism (4:1-5). We must be realistic. We came into the world with nothing, and but for the good start given to us by others our later efforts would not have been possible, let alone fruitful. However prosperous we may become, we must leave it all behind us in the end (Luke12:19-20). Life does not consist in having things or even in enjoying things (Luke12:15). It is having Christ and being with Him that makes life true and full (John 10:10).

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6:9-10

In a materialistic world, and with a fallen human nature that is essentially grasping and acquisitive to the point of ruthlessness, these are solemn and searching verses. They do not rebuke the rich, that comes later (17), but they caution those who want to be and are determined to be rich. It is an accurate use of language to say that a man can "lose" himself and destroy his spiritual life and his usefulness to God by an obsessive spirit of acquisition. There is no profit in that (Mk.8:36). No man means to ruin himself (and often he involves his whole family) but at some point he gets off the track. He is no longer set on God. Another ambition and objective have laid hold on him and he goes hard after these things in the way he once went hard after Christ, and the end is total loss. There comes a time, hopefully not too late, when he realises he has "played the fool and erred exceedingly" (1 Sam. 26:21 AV).

It is a wise hymn that prays,

"Tell me the old, old story,
When you have cause to fear,
That this world's empty glory
Is costing me too dear."

Think of Paul's sad words about Demas who forsook his leader and the work of Christ for love of the world (2 Tim. 4:10). How earnestly John counsels Christians not to love the world (1 John 2:15-17), an exhortation echoed by Paul writing to the Romans (Romans 12:1-2). A Christian is always challenged to live for the world that is to come, not this temporary passing one. We are pilgrims. We do not belong here and we must not have too many of the

wrong kind of attachments. Be honest enough to ask if the present pattern of your life is worth what it is costing you in terms of your spiritual well-being and usefulness.

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6:9-10

Take time today to read verses 6-10 and to think of them specifically in terms of the atmosphere we live in. The whole of society these days is obsessed and motivated by a greedy spirit in which there is no contentment. From every quarter there are cries of protest against any "eroding of our standards of living" in a day when shops are packed with luxury goods, cities crowded with eating and drinking paces, and when more and more people seem able to have ever more luxurious holidays. Let it be said at once that many pensioners and unemployed people have little to live on. But the general spirit of the age is one of discontent together with a spirit of resentment at any suggestion that extra effort should be required or that sacrifice should be accepted gladly if others would benefit. There is a spirit of jealousy if others have what we do not have, or if we think they have these things. Some have a house, others have not; some have a car, others have not; some have marriage and children and others have not; some have health and others have not. But when you think of it, sinners have no real rights to anything. All that we have is the gift of God's grace, and the sun and rain benefit the righteous and the unrighteous alike (Matthew 5:45). But if we are children of the Father we pray for daily bread (not cakes), for food and clothing, and we must learn to be content with basic necessities. This is so for two reasons: our Heavenly Father knows what we have need of (Matt. 6:32); and the day may come when economic collapse will necessitate our being able to cope with only basic provisions. Past generations have coped with this. But, have we grown so soft that we could not cope? If we have then our civilisation will revert to the law of the jungle.

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6:11-12

Paul begins to sum up the whole of this letter and he does so in terms of the exhortation, given in 1:18, to fight the good fight of faith. Having described the man who has an essentially worldly spirit, who is self-assertive and self-seeking (3-6), who is "hooked" on getting on and making money (7-10), and whose motivation and disposition are centred on this world, Paul urges Timothy to be different and to shun all that. It is an exhortation to make a specific choice of a certain way of life. He is God's man (11a) and must remember it. God has laid hold on him for specific purposes of blessing and service (4:14). This does not mean it is wrong to be and to do your best in your earthly calling, whatever it is. A Christian is not his own, but is bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19-20). For this reason he must set a guard and refuse to be *snares* by the worldly ambitions and temptations which will war against his soul (1 Pet. 2:11). They will not wither and drop off by themselves. They have to be cut out and a guard set lest they begin again to impinge on the spiritual life of a servant of God. No matter how much or how long a man has been used by God he must still watch and pray. Remember how Samson granted himself liberties he would not have allowed to others because he assumed he was strong spiritually. He took it for granted that God would not and could not do without him, but he learned other wise to his shame and confusion (Judges 16:20). Timothy must learn that both a flight and a following, a negative and a positive aspect are needed for fighting the fight of faith. The word Paul uses for both the verb and the noun "fight" is the word "agony". It is not easy. But Jesus never said that following Him would be easy. Read John 15:18-21; I6:1-4, 32-33.

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6:11-12

The list of things Timothy must follow is significant and comprehensive. Righteousness refers to a life conformed to God's will. Godliness is the mark of a life of devotion when a man walks with God, aware of God and in fellowship with God. Faith, as the whole of Hebrews 11 makes plain, is something that has to be learned in the disciplines of life. As God deals with His children he leads them into situations in which there is nothing they can do but look to Him. Love is the fruit of the Spirit, the love of God poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Gal. 5:22; Rom. 5:5). Love is something which speaks of willing response towards God and warmth towards men (1 Cor.13:4ff). Steadfastness or endurance is the spirit of loyalty, continuance and

patience which bears up even when life is a series of set-backs (2 Cor. 4:8-9). It is the spirit that steadies itself in God and exercises a steadying influence on others. It is the spirit that goes on and on, encouraging itself in God because hope in God is a sure anchor (Heb. 6:19). Gentleness refers to tenderness of spirit, which is not in any sense soft or weak, but is like God Himself, who so deals with His children that the bruised reed is not broken and the smouldering faith is not quenched (Isaiah 42:3). Gentleness is always in the business of lifting up the fallen, seeking for the lost, comforting the sorrowful and welcoming back the prodigal. If today we are left thinking about Jesus and wanting to be like Him, then today's study has not been in vain.

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6:11-12

The life of faith is a life of combat but Paul says it is good or beautiful. It is a fight for faith, to believe God and to stand where He has set us in Christ in spite of the accusations of Satan. It is a fight in faith, deliberately setting the things of God and eternity in the forefront of life, refusing the enticements of the world. This we can do only when we deliberately take hold of the eternal life we have been given. Paul seems to point Timothy back to his conversion and to his call to missionary service and reminds him of the basic facts of salvation in Christ. We do not battle towards victory. We start in Christ with victory. This is what it means to be "in Christ". We stand in Him and in His victory having as our present possession all the full provision of the salvation He won for us in His death and resurrection. We do not lack anything. All things are ours in Christ (1 Cor. 3:21-23). God *has* blessed us with every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1: 3-14) and it is right that we should remember to bless this God of salvation (1 Pet.1:3-9) whose divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3-11). God gives us the victory, and therefore our labour is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). Little wonder we rejoice in the God who is able to keep us from falling (Jude 24-25). Timothy must lay hold on the facts, and so must we. This is our confidence and hope. We look to the things that are unseen but eternal (Heb. 11:27; 2 Cor. 4:18) and we take our stand in the God of all grace whose purposes never fail (1 Pet. 5:10-11).

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6:13-14

Paul is very aware that he is giving a solemn and demanding charge to the young minister and he gives two words of encouragement. He reminds Timothy that the God he serves is the God of the resurrection, the God who gives life to the dead. It is the thought of God as Preserver rather than God as Creator that is dominant, but both elements are present. The God who brought light and order by the sovereign working of the Spirit at the time of creation is the same God who by the same Spirit operates in all ages carrying forward His sure purposes. We must learn never to narrow down the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. He is free to operate how, and when and where He wills, and is always beyond the grasp of mere man to explain or even discern. We are never really in the position of being able to say whether or not God is working or to what extent He is working. What we do know is that whenever there is work done it is done by the life-giving God. This is encouragement indeed. But Paul adds, also for encouragement rather than challenge (we are all too keen on challenge), the example of Jesus. The Saviour, in whom there was no fault, and who walked in faithfulness before God, ended up in the scandal of arrest, the pain of scourging, the shame of rejection and the apparent failure of His whole ministry. But think of the quiet dignity and assurance which marked Jesus before Pilate. Read Matt. 27:1-2, 11-31; John 18:28-19:16. This Jesus became the standard example of the faithful witness, as Rev.1:5; 3:14 make plain. Timothy is to stand for Jesus, in Jesus, with Jesus and like Jesus until Jesus comes again.

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6:13-14

The apparently simple words of Paul are full of meaning. He seems to be making Timothy think of what happened to Jesus in the short term and comparing that shame and rejection with the long-term victory of the resurrection. We also must learn to think long-term, and in our forward planning we must never forget that all we do is only "until He come." There is challenge in this, for we must be ready (Matt. 24:44; Lk.12:35-40). But there is also encouragement. In the midst of battle we must lift up our heads because our redemption draws near (Lk 21: 25-28;

Rom. 13:11-12). Paul's emphasis here on the appearing of Christ seems to be on the full shining out of His glory at His coming again, and seems to have something of a long-term perspective. This does not mean the apostle had moved away from his earlier thought of the return of Christ being imminent as he expressed it in his earlier epistles (1 Thess. 4:13-5:2; cf. 1 Cor.15: 51-52; Matt. 24:32-44). We should not think of the course of history moving on until it reaches the final T junction. Rather we must think of the world of time and of eternity as two parallel lines, separated only by a hairsbreadth. In that sense, a moment or a twinkling of an eye is the best way to describe the imminence and suddenness of Christ's coming again. As Jesus said, there will be all manner of speculation, prediction and false alarms. But we are not to be alarmed, nor are we to try to set dates (15). It is best for us not to know (Acts 1:7). There are things the Father keeps to Himself (Mk.13:32). Mere information does not necessarily help faith.

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6:15-16

Having spoken of God's inscrutability and of how He keeps certain things in His own knowledge and power, Paul seems to have been moved deeply and he proceeded to give a great doxology focusing on the person and glory of God. He did the same at the end of the exposition of salvation in Rom.11:33-36 and we do well to remember the need for this great emphasis on God Himself. In evangelical circles we do not seem to preach on the attributes of God as a former generation did, and in consequence we seem to have lost a great deal of the sense of worship that should mark a Christian gathering. We tend to start a meeting by trying to create a sense of affability and happy companionship, and often this is done by appealing to human feelings. But there is an authentic sense of fellowship and joy that comes from a true sense of worship when men and women of faith come to worship and to bow down knowing they are in fact in God's presence (Psalm 95:6). We must learn what God is like, not least to correct our thoughts of God which tend to be too small and limited. We sing the words, "with awe and wonder, and with bated breath" but to what extent does that express our attitude? We need to be aware of the greatness and grandeur of God, not least to correct the ideas of our own importance and competence. Think of how God-centred Paul was as he thought of his own conversion (Gal.1:3-5, 15-16); of the plan of redemption (Eph.1:9-11); and the final victory of the Son (1 Cor.15:24-28). We must never let the glory of God become a mere religious phrase. He is great, and greatly to be praised.

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6:15-16

Think of the definition of God in the Shorter Catechism: "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth." Such concepts as these must have been in Paul's mind when he spoke of God as the blessed and only Sovereign or Potentate (AV) or Ruler. God is spoken of as being blessed or happy. Is it right to think of the God of costly redemption in terms of happiness? Yes, because there are no discordant elements in His personality and He sees the end of His work when sin and sorrow have been done away with for ever. He is able to view and to enjoy all the very good things He has created, together with His many sons in glory (Heb. 2:10). God is also spoken of as the only sovereign or ruler. He stands alone in His majesty, ruling by His own right and power. No one can challenge Him, question Him or contradict Him. He works, and who can hinder or reverse it (Isa. 43:13)? Power belongs to Him (Ps. 62:11 AV). To whom can He be compared (Isa. 40:13-14,18, 21-26)? Listen to how He challenges proud man and exposes his limitations of understanding and power in Job 38:4-7ff. God's dominion is everlasting (Dan. 4:34-35) and He rules on earth even as He does in heaven (Matt. 6:10; Dan 4:17). This is the God of our salvation, our help in ages past and our hope for years to come (Ps. 90:1-2).

"Holy, holy, holy' Though the darkness hide Thee,
Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see,
Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee,
Perfect in power, in love, and purity."

(Heber)

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6:15-16

Paul seems totally absorbed in God as he continues his description. Think also of Timothy's reaction. Did the young minister realise he had a God like this? His sovereign disposition of all the events of time marks Him out as King over all kings and Lord over all lords. Was Paul thinking of Deut. 10:17-22, or Ps.136:1-3ff.? Did he anticipate Rev.17:14 and 19:16, because all God is is reflected in His Son (Heb.1:1-3). The sovereignty of the mighty God is seen in His giving His Son the name that is above every name. Consider Col.1:15-16; Eph.1:19-22; Phil. 2:9-11; and Rev.3:7. If all these scriptures were in Paul's mind and heart, and he was now an old man, we see just how the truth of God had become part of his basic pattern of thinking. He was just full of God's truth, and he thrilled to speak of God. Imagine his burning heart as he dictated this letter. God alone inherently possesses immortality. He is not just death-less, He is the source of all life, the fountain of life (Ps. 36:9; cf. John 4:13-14). He is the God who dwells in light and in whom there is no darkness at all. There is no shadow or fading (Jas.1:17; 1 John 1: 5). He is the transcendent God, far above all, in light no man can approach. Such is the splendour of light in God that God is hidden. No man has ever seen God, nor can see Him (Exod.33:17-23). And yet the gospel declares that He is not an unknown God because He has been made known, expounded and explained in His only Son (John 1:18). Read 2 Cor.4:6 and you will understand Paul's exultation, and his words of doxology, "To Him be honour and eternal dominion."

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6:17-19

It seems an anti-climax to come down to such practical exhortation after the soaring words of worship and doxology but here is no contradiction. Paul simply takes up the warning he had been giving in v.6-10. There is so much at stake in terms of fruitful service and personal joy that people must guard against losing it. The glorious God just described is also the benevolent God who pours out His riches on His people so that their joy might be full. This is what Jesus said in John15:11 and this theme of joy features right through the Bible. Think of Ps.16:11; Rom.15:13; Phil.4:4; 1 Pet.1:8; and Ps. 45 to mention but a few of the references. Paul speaks first of all to those who have riches, not to those who are seeking after them, and he echoes Jesus' warning about the difficulties of having a lot of money and things (Matt.19:23). It is not wrong to be rich, materially or spiritually, nor to enjoy those things, which are in fact blessings from God. But there must be detachment from them, and the only way to do that is by attachment to God. There are dangers in being blessed by God. We can so enjoy the gifts that we forget the Giver. We can have many riches, and then sin by failing to use them and so become poor (Prov.11:24-25). We who enjoy God's blessing are under obligation to share it and that can involve effort (Neh. 8:9-10). Being conscious of the blessing of God on our selves and our labours can make us proud, forgetting that all we have is the gift of God's grace. The sheer goodness of God in giving us so much of our heart's desire can intrude upon our trust, and the great Giver of every good and perfect gift gets edged out of our life and love.

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6:17-19

Those who are rich, whether in material things, personality and capacity, or in spiritual blessings are to be servants of others, actively setting themselves to do good. What do we do for others? When did we last go out of our way to minister to someone without expecting anything in return? What do we in fact do for the church and congregation that is our spiritual home and to whose worship, people and ministry we owe so very much? Note that these words of Paul are addressed to those who are rich, those who have the capacity and the opportunity to minister to others. They are to serve with gladness and generosity of heart and hand, and we might well add with tongue. How much good can be done by the kindly word spoken in genuine interest. What encouragement can be ministered in a few minutes' conversation. But it must be spontaneous and non self-conscious as Jesus' words in Matt. 25:44 make plain. Entertaining strangers can be surprising work with great reward (Heb.13:2). The words about laying up a foundation may echo Jesus' words in Matt. 6:19-21; 7:24-27; Lk.18:22; and Paul's own words in 1 Cor. 3:10-15. This way of life may be costly, but it is life indeed, and does not need to be propped up by artificial supports such

as uncertain riches. Note how Paul's eyes were very much on the future. When the end of the road came and he saw the face of Jesus he wanted it to be in joy, not in shame and regret. If God blesses you in church, go out determined to be a blessing to others in the course of the week. Tell God you are willing to be a servant for Jesus' sake, and take whatever opportunities are given no matter how humble they are.

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6:20-21

Before our last study in this fascinating epistle consider the words of this hymn by A. A. Proctor. Life is very down to earth, and it is by faith that we understand and are able to accept what is given to us, because we believe God is good and He loves us to the full.

"My God, I thank Thee, who hast made
The earth so bright,
So full of splendour and of joy,
Beauty and light;
So many glorious things are here,
Noble and right.

"I thank Thee too, that Thou hast made
Joy to abound.
So many gentle thoughts and deeds
Circling us round
That in the darkest spot of earth
Some love is found.

"I thank Thee more that all our joy
Is touched with pain,
That shadows fall on brightest hours,
That thorns remain,
So that earth's bliss may be our guide,
And not our chain.

"For Thou who knowest, Lord, how soon
Our weak heart clings,
Hast given us joys, tender and true,
Yet all with wings,
So that we see, gleaming on high,
Diviner things.

"I thank Thee, Lord, that here our souls,
Though amply blest,
Can never find, although they seek,
A perfect rest,
Nor ever shall, until they lean
On Jesus' breast."

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6:20-21

There is an earnestness in Paul's final words, spoken with such appeal. Timothy must ever remember that something very precious has been entrusted to his care. He must be a faithful guardian as well as preacher and

teacher (1 Cor. 4:1-2). Of course, he must also remember, as Paul declares in 2 Tim. 1:11-14, that God also stands guardian. He is well able to keep both the message and the messenger. At the same time, we must be watchful because the Gospel is not ours to deal with and to manipulate as we choose. We are servants who will be called to account. To be faithful to the message Timothy must turn way from bombastic talk and arrogant speculations about the content of the message. The word for "opposing ideas" is "antithesis". It refers to the practice of setting Old and New Testaments over against each other, and then placing various "religions" over against each other, comparing, combining and confusing the message of the Gospel until it is no Gospel at all. There is a false intellectualism and a false spirituality both of which make people miss the mark as regards the faith. We must hold fast to the fact that God has spoken fully and finally all that needs to be said and known about salvation. It is all in His Son Jesus Christ. Apart from Christ we need nothing. Christ is all, and those who in any way deny this or add to this are guilty of preaching another gospel which is not a gospel (Gal.1:6ff.). If we have learned from this epistle we will set our hearts and minds on Christ and go after Him, determined to press toward the mark for the prize (Phil. 3:12-14).

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