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COMMENTARY

**DARBY'S SYNOPSIS OF THE
BOOKS OF THE BIBLE
PART 2: NEW TESTAMENT**

by John Nelson Darby

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John Nelson Darby, 1800-1882

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2 TIMOTHY

The second epistle to Timothy has a very peculiar character. It is the expression of his heart, who outside Palestine had, under God, founded and built the assembly of God on earth, and it was written in sight of its failure, and its departure from the principles on which he had established it. God remained faithful; His foundation was sure and immovable; but the work committed into the hands of men was already enfeebled and decaying. The consciousness of this state of things, which moreover betrayed itself in the way in which the apostle himself was then forsaken, oppressed his heart; and he pours it out into the bosom of his faithful Timothy. By this means the Spirit instructs us in the solemn truth, that the church has not kept its first estate, and sets before us the ways of safety for those who seek God, and desire to please Him, in such a state of things as this.

The apostle John gives the history of the fall of the assembly here below, and of its judgment, and that of the world likewise. He also sets before us a life which, apart from all questions of the assembly's condition, abides ever the same, which renders us capable of enjoying God, and makes us resemble Him in His nature and character.

As a witness John was to remain until the Lord came: but Paul sees for himself the ruin of that which he had built and watched over so faithfully. He had spent himself for the assembly, accomplishing that which was behind of the sufferings of Christ; and he had to see that which he had so much loved (which he had cared for even as a mother cherishes her nursling which he had planted as God's plant on the earth) grow feeble as to its condition and testimony in the world, depart from the source of strength, and become corrupt. What a painful experience! But it is that of the servant of God in all ages and in all dispensations. He sees indeed the power of God acting to plant the testimony on earth, but he sees that men soon fail in it. The house inhabited by the Holy Ghost becomes dilapidated and in disorder. Nevertheless (and we love to repeat it with the apostle) the sure foundation of the Lord abides for ever. Whatever may be the condition of the whole company, the individual is always to depart

from all iniquity, and to maintain, by himself if need be, the true testimony of the name of the Lord. This can never fail the faithful soul.

In view of the mixture and confusion which began to show itself in the assembly, the apostle's comfort was founded on these two principles, while remembering and joyfully availing himself of the communion and faithfulness of some precious souls. He had such as Timothy and Onesiphorus, amid the afflictions of the gospel and the sorrow of being forsaken by so many who were seals to his testimony before the Lord.

The apostle begins by taking the ground of grace and of individual life — which never changes in essential character — outside church privileges. Not that these had changed; but he could no longer connect them with the general body on earth. He calls himself here an apostle according to the promise of eternal life which is in Christ Jesus. It is not merely the Messiah, it is not the head of the body, it is the promise of life which is in Him.

Paul addresses his dearly beloved son Timothy, whose affection he remembers. He desired greatly to see him, being mindful of his tears, shed probably at the time when Paul was made prisoner, or when he was separated from him on that occasion, or when he heard of it. It is the confidence of a friend that is speaking to one whose heart he knew. We see something of this, but in the perfection that was peculiar to Himself, in Jesus on the cross, in that which He said to John and to His mother. A similar form would have been unsuitable in Paul. The affections of men show themselves in and by their wants, the wants of their hearts; those of the Lord by His condescension. With Him all is in itself perfect. With us it is only by grace that all is in its right place. But when separation to service in power, which knows but that, is over, nature according to God has its right place. In the consecrated meat-offering that was to be made with fire, honey had no place.

Verse 3. The apostle does not speak any longer of the high character of his work, but of his personal position rightly felt according to the Spirit. He had served God, following in the steps of his forefathers, with a pure conscience. In every way he was a vessel made unto honor. For more than one generation his ancestors were distinguished for a good conscience; and personal piety, founded on the truth, showed itself in the service of God.

Paul was not here expressing a judgment as to the inward condition of each generation: it was their character. He calls to mind a similar fact with regard to Timothy, in whose case however personal faith is referred to, known to Paul himself, so that the bond, though of personal feeling, was christian.* Judaism, as to its outward obligations, is totally absent; for the father of Timothy was a Greek, and the marriage of his Jewish mother was unclean according to the law, and would have rendered Timothy also unclean and deprived him of Jewish rights; and in fact he had not been circumcised when an infant. Paul did it, which was also not according to the law, unless Timothy had become a proselyte. Both heathens and their children were excluded, as we read in Nehemiah. Paul's act was above the law. Here he takes no notice of it; he leaves the Gentile father out of sight, and speaks only of the personal unfeigned faith of Timothy's mother and grandmother, and that of his beloved disciple himself.

[* It is indeed the basis of the exhortation of verse 6. When the faith of so many is giving way, he turns to the personal confidence which his heart had in Timothy, nourished up through grace by the atmosphere he had lived in.]

The state of the assembly was only an additional occasion for the exercise of his faith, and for his zealous activity of heart and courage. Difficulties and dangers multiplied on every hand; the unfaithfulness of Christians was added to all the rest. But God is none the less with His people. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind, so that the Lord's laborer, the man of God, he who kept himself in communion with God in order to represent Him on the earth, was to stir up the gift that was in him, and (as the apostle expresses it with admirable and touching force and clearness) to endure the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God. Here, in the case of Timothy, the apostle could make mention of a special gift of the Spirit, which had been conferred upon Timothy, through the laying on of hands. In the first epistle he had spoken of the prophecy which had called him or pointed him out for the possession of this gift, and told us that it had been accompanied by the laying on of the hands of the elders; here he tells us that the laying on of his own hands was the means of bestowing it upon him.

The apostle reminds him of this proof of power and reality in his ministry (and in that of Paul himself), in view of this period when its exercise was

more difficult. When all is prosperous, and the progress of the gospel is remarkable, so that even the world is struck with it, the work is found to be easy, in spite of difficulties and opposition; and — such is man — even in consequence of this opposition one is bold and persevering. But when others, Christians even, forsake the laborer, when evil and the deceptions of the enemy come in, when love has grown cold, and, because one is faithful, prudence takes alarm, and desires a less forward walk, to stand firm in circumstances like these, to persevere in the work, and maintain one's courage, is not an easy thing. We must possess Christianity with God, so that we know why we stand fast: we must be ourselves in communion with Him, in order to have the strength necessary to continue laboring in His name, and the sustainment of His grace at all times.

God then has given us the Spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind; the apostle had received such a position from God, that he had been able to bestow on Timothy the gift needed for his service; but the state of spirit and soul which could use it was part of the inheritance of every Christian who leant really on God. Nor was he to be ashamed either of the testimony, which was losing outwardly its onward current in the world, nor of Paul who was now a prisoner. How precious to possess that which is eternal, that which is founded on the power and on the work of God Himself! There were indeed the afflictions of the gospel, but he should take part in them and not shrink, enduring according to the power of God. God has saved us, has called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, as though anything depended on man, but according to His own purpose and His grace given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. This is the sure and immovable foundation, a rock for our souls, against which the waves of difficulty break in vain, showing a strength which we could not resist for a moment, but showing also their total powerlessness against the purpose and work of God. The efforts of the enemy only prove that he is without strength, in the presence of that which God is, and of that which He has done for us. And the apostle identifies his ministry with this, and the sufferings he was undergoing. But he knew whom he had believed and his happiness was safe laid up with Him.

That which we have to seek is the power of the Spirit, in order that we may realise this gift of God by faith, and that we may abide, as to our hearts, as to our practical faith, in the sense of our union with Christ, upon

this immutable foundation, which is nothing less than the immutability and the glory of God Himself. For His purpose has been manifested; that purpose, which gave us a place and a portion in Christ Himself, was now manifested through the appearance of that very Christ.

It is no longer a nation chosen in the world to display in it the principles of the government of God, and of His ways in righteousness, in patience, in kindness, and in power, on the earth (however unchangeable His counsels, however sure His calling), as manifested in His dealings with regard to the people whom He called.

It is a counsel of God, formed and established in Christ before the world existed, which has its place in the ways of God, outside and above the world, in union with the Person of His Son, and in order to manifest a people united with Him in glory. Thus is it a grace which was given us in Him, before the world was. Hidden in the counsels of God, this purpose of God was manifested with the manifestation of Him in whom it had its accomplishment. It was not merely blessings and dealings with God with regard to men — it was life, eternal life in the soul, and incorruptibility in the body. Thus Paul was apostle according to the promise of life.

While Christ Himself was alive, although life was in Him, this purpose of God was not accomplished with respect to us. The power of life, divine power in life, was to manifest itself in the destruction of the power of death brought in by sin and in which Satan reigned over sinners. Christ then in His resurrection has annulled death, and by the gospel has brought to light both life and incorruptibility, that is to say, that condition of eternal life which puts the soul and the body beyond death and its power. Thus the glad tidings of this work were addressed to all men. Founded in the eternal counsels of God, established in the Person of Christ, the work necessary for its fulfillment being accomplished by Him, possessing a character altogether outside Judaism, and the mere government of God in the earth, Paul's gospel was unto all men. Being the manifestation of the eternal counsels and power of God, having to do with man as lying under the power of death, and with the accomplishment of a victory that placed man beyond that power, and in an entirely new condition which depended on the power of God and His purposes, it addressed itself to man, to all men, Jews or Gentiles without distinction. Knowing Adam dead by sin

and Christ alive in the power of divine life, he announced this good news to man — deliverance, and a totally new state of things.

It was to proclaim this gospel that the apostle had been called as a herald. It was for this he suffered, and, in the sense of what had caused it, was not ashamed to suffer. For he knew whom he had believed; he knew His power. He believed in the gospel that he preached, and therefore in the victorious power of Him in whom he believed. He could die with regard to the life that he had received from the first Adam, he could be dishonored and put to shame in the world and by the world: life in Christ, the power by which Christ had won a place for man outside the condition of the first Adam, life as Christ now possesses it was not touched thereby. Not that life had not been there before, but death and he that had the power of death were not overcome, and all was dark beyond the closing tomb: a lightning flash might pass across the gloom, adequate ground be laid for the just conclusion of the Pharisee, but life and incorruptibility were not brought to light but in Christ and His resurrection.

But this is not all which is here expressed. The apostle does not say “in what I have believed,” but “whom”: an important difference, which places us (as to our confidence) in connection with the Person of Christ Himself. The apostle had spoken of the truth, but truth is allied to the Person of Christ. He is the truth; and in Him truth has life, has power, is linked with the love which applies it, which maintains it in the heart and the heart by it. “I know,” says the apostle, “whom I have believed.” He had committed his happiness to Christ. In Him was that life in which the apostle participated; in Him, the power that sustained it, and that preserved in heaven the inheritance of glory which was his portion where this life was developed.

Encouraged by this hope, and committing himself to Jesus, he had endured all things for Him, and for those who were His; he had accepted all suffering here, he was ready to die daily. His happiness, in the glory of that new life, he had committed to Jesus; he labored meanwhile in affliction, sure of finding again, without being deceived, that which he had committed to the Lord, in the day when he should see Him and all his sorrows ended. It was in the expectation of that day, in order to find it again at that day, that he had committed to Him his happiness and his joy.

Moreover, his own career would soon be finished; his eyes therefore turn towards Timothy for the welfare of the assembly here below. He exhorts him to be steadfast, to hold fast the truth, as he had taught it to him (it was the testimony of the Lord), but the truth in its realisation by faith in Christ, and according to the power of love that is found in communion with Him. It is this which, as we have seen, the apostle had realised. The truth, and living grace in Jesus, in faith and in love, which gave it its power and its value — these are, as it were, the pivots of strength and faithfulness at all times, and especially for the man of God, when the assembly in general is unfaithful.

Truth as it was taught by the apostles and expressed by them, the manner in which they presented the truth, “the form of sound words,” is the inspired expression of that which God was pleased to reveal; and that, in all the relationships in which the truth is linked together, in all its different parts, according to the living nature and power of God, who is necessarily its center as He is its source. Nothing except revelation could be this expression. God expresses everything as it is, and in a living way; and by His word all exists. He is the source and the center of all things. All flow from Him — are in relation with a living Person, namely Himself, who is their source, from whom all hold their existence. This existence only subsists in connection with Him; and the relationship of all things to Him, and between themselves, is found in the expression of His mind — in that measure at least in which He puts Himself in relation with man in all these things. If evil comes in, as regards will or its consequences in judgment, it is because this relationship is broken; and the relationship that is broken is the measure of the evil.

Thus we see the immense importance of the word of God. It is the expression of the relationship of all things to God; whether as regards their existence — that is, creation — or with respect to His counsels; or even as to His own nature, and the relationship of man with Him, and the communication of life received from Him, and the maintenance of His true character. It comes from heaven as did the living Word, reveals what is there; but adapts itself, as the living Word did, to man here, directs him where there is faith here, but leads him up there where the living Word is gone as Man.

The more we consider the word, the more we shall see its importance. Analogously to Christ the living Word, it has its source on high, and reveals what is there, and is perfectly adapted to man down here, giving a perfect rule according to what is up there, and, if we are spiritual, leading us up there: our conversation is in heaven. We must distinguish between the relationship in which man stood as child of Adam, and as child of God. The law is the perfect expression of the requirements of the former, the rule of life to him; it is found to be to death. Once we are sons of God, the life of the Son of God as man down here becomes our rule of life. "Be ye imitators of God as dear children, and walk in love as Christ hath loved us."

In His nature, as the author of all existence, and the center of all authority and subsistence outside Himself, God is the center of all, and the upholder of all. As to His counsels, Christ is the center, and here man has a peculiar place; wisdom's good pleasure was eternally in Him, and all is to be under His feet. In order that the nature and the counsels of God should not be separated (which indeed is impossible, but what was in His counsels in order that it might not be), God became man. Christ is God made manifest in flesh, the Word made flesh. Thus the divine nature, the expression of that nature, is found in that which is the object of His counsels, that which forms their center. Thus Christ is the truth — is the center of all existing relationships: all have reference to Him. We are, through Him, for Him, or we are against Him; all subsist by Him. If we are judged, it is as His enemies. He is the life (spiritually) of all that enjoy the communication of the divine nature; even as He sustains all that exists. His manifestation brings to light the true position of all things. Thus He is the truth. All that He says, being the words of God, are spirit and life; quickening, acting according to grace, judging with regard to the responsibility of His creatures.

But there is yet more than this. He is the revelation of love. God is love, and in Jesus love is in action and is known by the heart that knows Him. The heart that knows Him lives in love, and knows love in God. But He is also the object in whom God is revealed to us, and has become the object of entire reliance. Faith is born by His manifestation. It existed indeed through partial revelation of this same object, by means of which God made Himself known; but these were only partial anticipations of that

which has been fully accomplished in the manifestation of Christ, of the Son of God. The object is the same: formerly, the subject of promise and prophecy; now, the personal revelation of all that God is, the image of the invisible God, the One in whom the Father also is known.

Thus faith and love have their birth, their source, in the object which by grace has created them in the soul: the object in which it has learnt what love is, and with regard to which faith is exercised. By Him we believe in God. No one has ever seen God: the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has revealed Him.

Truth is thus revealed, for Jesus is the truth, the expression of that which God is, so as to put all things perfectly in their place, in their true relationships with God and with each other. Faith and love find the occasion of their existence in the revelation of the Son of God, of God as a Savior in Christ.

But there is another aspect of the accomplishment of the work and of the counsels of God, which we have not yet spoken of: that is, the communication of the truth and of the knowledge of God. This is the work of the Holy Ghost, in which the truth and the life are united, for we are begotten by the word. It is divine energy in the Deity, acting in all that connects God with the creature or the creature with God. Acting in divine perfection as God, in union with the Father and the Son, the Holy Ghost reveals the counsels of which we have spoken, and makes them effectual in the heart, according to the purpose of the Father, and by the revelation of the Person and work of the Son. I have said, divine energy, not as a theological definition — which is not my object here — but as a practical truth, for, while attributing all that regards the creature to the Father (except judgment, which is entirely committed to the Son, because He is the Son of man) and to the Son, the immediate action in creation and on the creature, wherever it takes place, is attributed to the Spirit.

The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters when this earth was formed; by His Spirit the heavens were garnished; we are born of the Spirit; sealed with the Spirit; holy men of God spake by the Spirit; gifts were the operation of the Spirit distributing to whom He would; He bears witness with our spirits; He groans in us; we pray by the Holy Ghost, if that grace is bestowed upon us. The Lord Himself, born as man in this

world, was conceived by the Holy Ghost; by the Spirit of God He cast out devils. The Spirit bears witness of all things, that is to say, of all truth in the word: the love of the Father, the nature and the glory of God Himself, His character, the Person and glory and love of the Son, His work, form the substance of His testimony, with all that relates to man in connection with these truths. The Spirit's witness to these things is the word, and — produced by means of men — takes the shape of the truth formally set forth by revelation. Christ is the truth, as we have seen, the center of all the ways of God; but what we are now speaking of is the divine communication of this truth; and in this way it can be said that the word is the truth.* But, although communicated by means of men, so that it takes a form adapted to man, its source is divine; and He who has communicated it is divine: He of whom it is said, "he shall not speak of himself" (that is to say, from Himself — apart from the Father and the Son). Consequently the revelation of the truth has all the depth, the universality of relationship, the inseparable connection with God (without which it would not be truth, for all that is separate from God is falsehood), which truth itself possesses — necessarily possesses — because it is the expression of the relationships which all things have to God in Christ; that is to say, of God's own thoughts, of which all these relationships are but the expression. It is true that this revelation also judges all that is not in accordance with these relationships, and judges according to the value of the relationship that is broken with regard to God Himself, and the place which this relationship has in His mind.** When this word is received through the quickening work of the Holy Ghost in the heart, it is efficacious; there is faith, the soul is in real living practical relationship with God according to that which is expressed in the revelation it has received. The truth — which speaks of the love of God, of holiness, of cleansing from all sin, of eternal life, of the relationship of children — being received into the heart, places us in real present living relationship with God, according to the force of all these truths, as God conceives them and as He has revealed them to the soul. Thus they are vital and efficacious by the Holy Ghost; and the consciousness of this revelation of the truth, and of the truth of that which is revealed, and of really hearing the voice of God in His word, is faith.

[* Hence also it is said (1 John 5), "The Spirit is truth."

[** This is true as regards guilt. But God, being perfectly revealed, and that in grace as the Father and the Son, our apprehension of the ruin in which we are, goes deeper far than the sense of guilt as the breach of previously existing relationships. We were guilty according to our place as men. But we were without God in the world, and (when God is known) this is awful. The beginning of Romans treats the question of guilt; Ephesians 2, the state we were in; John 5:24 briefly resumes grace as to both. The relationship now is an entirely new one, founded on purpose, redemption, and our being children of God.]

But all this is true in the revealed word before I believe in it, and in order that I may believe in it — may believe in the truth — although the Holy Ghost alone makes us hear the voice of God in it, and so produces faith. And that which is revealed in it is the divine expression of that which belongs to the infinite on the one side, and is expressed in the finite on the other; of that which has the profoundness of the nature of God, from whom all proceeds, with whom and with whose rights all is in relationship, but which is developed — since it is outside God — in creation and in the finite.

The union of God and man in the Person of Christ is the center — we may say (now that we know it) the necessary center of all this, as we have seen. And the inspired word is its expression according to the perfection of God, and (we bless God for it, as the Savior is the grand subject of the scriptures, “for,” said He, “they testify of me”) in human forms.

But this word, being divine, being inspired, is the divine expression of the divine nature, persons, and counsels. Nothing that is not inspired in this way can have this place — for none but God can perfectly express or reveal what God is — hence infinite in what flows in it; because it is the expression of, and connected with, the depths of the divine nature, and so in its connection infinite, though expressed in a finite sense, and so far finite in expression, and thus adapted to finite man. Nothing else is the divine expression of the divine mind and truth, or is in direct union with the unmixed source, even though it sprang from the same source. The immediate connection is broken; that which is said is no longer divine. It may contain many truths, but the living derivation, the infinite, the union with God, the immediate and uninterrupted derivation from God, are wanting. The infinite is no longer there. The tree grows from its root, and forms one whole; the energy of life pervades it — the sap which flows from the root. We may consider one part, as God has set it there, as a part

of the tree; we may see the importance of the trunk; the beauty of the development in its smallest details, the stateliness of the whole, in which the vital energy combines liberty and harmony of form. We see that it is a whole, united in one by the same life that produced it. The leaves, the flowers, the fruit, all tell us of the warmth of that divine Sun which developed them, of the gushing inexhaustible stream which nourishes them. But we cannot separate one part, be it ever so beautiful, from the tree, without depriving it of the energy of life and its relationship with the whole.

When the power of the Spirit of God produces the truth, it develops itself in union with its source, whether in revelation or even in the life and in the service of the individual; although in the two latter cases there is a mixture of other elements, owing to the weakness of the man. When a man's mind apprehends the truth, and he seeks to give it a form, he does it according to the capacity of man, which is not its source; the truth as he expresses it, even were it pure, is separated in him from its source and its totality; but, besides this, the shape that a man gives it always bears the stamp of the man's weakness. He has only apprehended it partially, and he only produces a part of it. Accordingly it is no longer the truth. Moreover, when he separates it from the whole circle of truth in which God has placed it, he must necessarily clothe it in a new form, in a garment which proceeds from man: at once error mixes with it. Thus it is no longer a vital part of the whole, it is partial, and thereby not the truth; and it is in fact mixed with error. That is theology.

In the truth there is, when God expresses it, love, holiness, authority, as they are in Him the expression of His own relationships with man, and of the glory of His being. When man gives it a shape, all this is wanting and cannot be in it, because it is man who shapes it. It is no longer God speaking. God gives it a perfect form; that is to say, He expresses the truth in words of certainty. If man gives it a form, it is no longer the truth given of God. Therefore to hold fast the truth in the form God has given it, the type, the shape in which He has expressed it, is of all importance: we are in relationship with God in it according to the certainty of that which He has revealed. This is the sure resource of the soul, when the assembly has lost its power and its energy, and is no longer a sustainment to feeble

souls; and that which bears its name no longer answers to the character given it, in the first epistle, “the pillar and support of the truth.”*]

[* The doctrines or dogmas of scripture have their importance and their adaptation to the simplest soul in this, that they are facts, and so objects of faith, not notions. Thus Christ is God, Christ is man, the Holy Ghost is a Person, and the like, are facts for faith, realised in the simplest soul.]

The truth, clear and positive truth, given as a revelation from God in the words — clothed with His authority — by which He has given the truth a form, communicating the facts and the divine thoughts which are necessary for the salvation of men, and for their participation in divine life — this it is which we are to hold fast.

We are only sure of the truth when we retain the very language of God which contains it. By grace I may speak of the truth in all liberty, I may seek to explain it, to communicate it, to urge it on the conscience, according to the measure of light and spiritual power bestowed upon me; I may endeavor to demonstrate its beauty, and the connection between its various parts. Every Christian, and especially those who have a gift from God for the purpose, may do this. But the truth which I explain and propose is the truth as God has given it, and in His own words in the revelation He has made. I hold fast the form of sound words, which I have received from a divine source and authority: it gives me certainty in the truth.

And here it is important to remark the assembly’s part when faithful. She receives, she maintains the truth in her own faith; she guards it, she is faithful to it, she is subject to it, as a truth, a revelation, which comes from God Himself. She is not the source of the truth. As an assembly she does not propagate it — does not teach it. She says “I believe,” not “Believe.” This last is the function of ministry, in which man is always individually in relationship with God by means of a gift which he holds from God, and for the exercise of which he is responsible to God. This is all-important. Those who possess these gifts are members of the body. The assembly exercises her discipline with regard to all that is of the flesh in them, in the exercise or apparent exercise of a gift, as in all else. She preserves her own purity without respect of persons as to their outward appearance, being guided therein by the word (for this is her responsibility); but she does not teach, she does not preach.

The word goes before the assembly, for she has been gathered together by the word. The apostles, a Paul, those who were scattered abroad by the persecution, a thousand faithful souls, have proclaimed the word, and thus the assembly has been gathered out. It has been said that the assembly was before the scriptures. As regards the written contents of the New Testament, this is true; but the preached word was before the assembly. The assembly is its fruit, but is never its source. The edification even of the assembly, when it has been gathered together, comes direct from God, through the gifts which He has bestowed; the Holy Ghost distributing to each according to His will.

The scriptures are the means which God has used to preserve the truth, to give us certainty in it; seeing the fallibility of the instruments by whom it is propagated, since revelation has ceased.

If at the beginning He filled certain persons with His Spirit in such a way that error was excluded from their preaching, if besides this He then gave revelations in which there was nothing but His own word, yet as a general rule preaching is the fruit of the Holy Ghost in the heart, and its spirituality is only in measure, and there is the possibility of error. Here, whatever may be the power of the Spirit's work, we have to judge (see Acts 17:11:1 Corinthians 14:29). Farther on we shall see that in forming this judgment, it is the scriptures which assure those who are led of God.

We have thus in the ways of God respecting this subject three things closely united, yet different; ministry, the assembly, and the word of God, that is, the written word; when it is not written, it belongs to the order of ministry.

Ministry — as regards the word, for this is not the only service — preaches to the world, and teaches or exhorts the members of the assembly.

The assembly enjoys communion with God, is fed, and grows by means of that with which its different members supply it. It preserves, and, in its confession, bears witness to the truth. It maintains holiness, and, by the grace and presence of the Holy Ghost, enjoys mutual communion; and, in love, cares for the temporal need of all its members.

The written word is the rule which God has given, containing all that He has revealed. It is complete (Colossians 1:25). It can, because it is the truth, be the means of communicating the truth to a soul: the Holy Ghost can use it as a means; but at all events it is the perfect rule, the authoritative communication of the will and the mind of God, for the assembly.

The assembly is subject, is to be faithful, to have no will. It does not reveal, it maintains by its confession, it watches over that which it has, it does not communicate; it has received and is faithfully to keep. The man directs, that is, Christ: the woman obeys, and is faithful to her husband's thoughts — at least ought to be so (1 Corinthians 11): this is the assembly. The oracles of God are committed to her. She does not give them; she obeys them.

The minister is bound individually to the same faithfulness. This we understand; and in our epistle we have especially to do with this individual responsibility. That which the assembly is in this respect is revealed in the first epistle (chap. 3:15). Here it is the individual who is to hold fast this form of sound words which he has received from a divine source, for such the apostle was, in his apostolic function, as an instrument. Neither Timothy nor the assembly could frame such a form of sound words; their part was to hold it fast, having received it.

And here, as we have said, however unfaithful the assembly may be, the individual is bound to be faithful and always to be so.

This therefore is what we have to do: the truth which is set before us in the inspired word we are (and I am) to hold fast, in the form in which it is presented to us. I am to hold it fast, not merely as a proposition, but in union with the Head, in faith and love, which are in Christ Jesus. Strength to fulfill comes from above. For here another point is brought before us. The Holy Ghost has been given indeed to the assembly; but a period of unfaithfulness is here contemplated (v. 15). He has been given to the man of God, to each Christian, and to each servant with reference to the service appointed him. By the Holy Ghost we are to keep the good thing that has been committed to us. In days like those, this was the duty of the man of God; and in our day, things have gone much farther. Possessing the promise of life, and forsaken by the mass of Christians, he is to hold fast

the truth in the words in which it has been expressed by divine authority (this is what we have in the word, and not merely doctrine: people may say that they have the doctrine of Peter and Paul, but they cannot say that they have their words, the form of the truth as Paul and Peter gave it, elsewhere than in their writings); and he is to hold it fast in faith and love, which are in Christ. Moreover he is to keep, by the power of the Holy Ghost, the substance of the truth, that which has been given us as a treasure — the deposit of divine truth and riches, which has been given us as our portion here below.

In verses 15-18 we find that the mass had quite turned away from the apostle, so that the affection and faithfulness of one became very precious to him. What a change already since the beginning of the gospel! Compare the Thessalonians, the Ephesians: they were the same people (for Ephesus was the capital of what is here called Asia) among whom Paul had preached, so that all Asia had heard the gospel; and see how they had all now forsaken him!

We must not however suppose that they had all abandoned the profession of Christianity; but their faith had become weak, and they did not like to identify themselves with a man who was in disgrace with the authorities, who was despised and persecuted, a prisoner — a man whose energy brought reproach and personal difficulties upon himself. They withdrew from him, and left him to answer alone for himself. Sad result of spiritual decline! But what sentiments should animate the man of God at such a moment? He must be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Christ was not changed, whatever the case might be with men; and he who suffered from their desertion could, without being discouraged, exhort his beloved Timothy to persevere steadily in the word. Nor do we find anywhere the man of God called to more full and unhesitating courage than in this epistle, which is the testimony of the failure and ruin of the assembly.

The truth was the especial treasure committed to him; and he was not only to keep it, as we have seen, but to take care that it was propagated and communicated to others after him, and perhaps still farther. That which he had heard from Paul in the presence of many witnesses (who could confirm Timothy in his convictions respecting the truth, and certify others that it was indeed what he had received from Paul) he was to communicate

to faithful men, who were capable of teaching others. This was the ordinary means. It is not the Spirit in the assembly, so that the assembly was an authority, it is no longer revelation. Timothy, well instructed in the doctrine preached by the apostle, and confirmed in his views by many other witnesses who had likewise learned of Paul, so that it was common to all as known received truth, was to take care that it should be communicated to other faithful men. Neither had this anything to do with giving them authority, with consecrating them, as has been said. It is the communication to them of the truth which he had received from Paul.

This procedure shuts out the idea of the assembly as the propagator of the truth. It was the business of the faithful son in the faith of the apostle, of the ministry.

Timothy himself was not an authority either. He was an instrument for the communication of the truth, and was to enable others to be so likewise: a very different thing from being the rule of the truth. That which he had heard — and the other witnesses served as a guarantee against the introduction of anything false, or even of his own opinions, if he had been inclined to entertain them — that he was to communicate.

It is thus that, in the ordinary sense, ministry is continued; care is taken by competent persons for the communication, not of authority, but of the truth, to other faithful persons. God can raise up any one whom He chooses, and give him the energy of His Spirit; and where this is found, there is power and an effectual work: but the passage we are considering supposes the careful communication of the truth to persons fit for this work. Both principles equally shut out the idea of the communication of official authority, and the idea of the assembly being either an authority with regard to the faith or the propagator of the truth. If God raised up whom He pleased, in whatever way He pleased, the means which He employed (when there was no special operation on His part) was to cause the truth to be communicated to individuals capable of propagating it. This is a widely different thing from bestowing authority, or the exclusive or official right to preach. And it was known revealed truth he was to communicate, that had the direct authority of revelation — what Paul's writings can alone furnish us now, or of course other inspired writings.

The apostle goes on to show the qualities that Timothy ought to possess, in order to carry on the work amid the circumstances that surrounded him, and in which the assembly itself was found. He must know how to endure hardships, vexations, difficulties, sorrows, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; he must beware of entangling himself with the affairs of life. A soldier, when in service, could not do so, but must be free from every hindrance, that he may please the one who had called him to arms. So also, as in the lists, he must fight according to rule, according to that which became the Lord's servant and was conformable to the Lord's will. And he must labor first, that he may have a right to enjoy the fruit of his labor. These are the practical conditions of divine service for whosoever engages in it. He must endure, be unentangled in the world, fight lawfully, and labor on first* before he looked for fruits.

[* Read "The husbandman must labor before partaking." 2 Timothy 2:6.]

The apostle returns to the elementary but fundamental principles of the truth, and to the sufferings of ministry, which moreover were in nowise a hindrance to the operations of the Spirit of God in extending the sphere in which the truth was propagated, and the word of God made known. Nothing could restrain the power of that instrument of the work of God.

The truth of the gospel (dogma is not the subject here) was divided into two parts, of which the apostle speaks also in the epistle to the Romans: the fulfillment of the promises; and the power of God in resurrection. "Jesus Christ, of the seed of David; raised from the dead." These, in fact, are, as it were, the two pivots of the truth. God faithful to His promises (shewn especially in connection with the Jews); and God mighty to produce an entirely new thing by His creative and quickening power, as manifested in the resurrection, which also put the seal of God upon the Person and the work of Christ.

The afflictions found in the path of service in the gospel assume here a high and peculiar character in the mind of the suffering and blessed apostle. It is participation in the sufferings of Christ, and, in the case of Paul, to a very remarkable degree. The expressions he uses are such as might be employed in speaking of Christ Himself as regards His love. As to the propitiation, naturally no other could take part in that: but in devotedness, and in suffering for love and for righteousness, we have the privilege of

suffering with Him. And here what part had the apostle with these sufferings? “I endure,” He says, “all things for the elect’s sakes.” This is truly what the Lord did. The apostle trod closely on His footsteps, and with the same purpose of love — ”that they might obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.” Here of course the apostle has to add, “which is in Christ Jesus”; still, the language is marvelous in the lips of any other person than the Lord Himself. For it is what Christ did.

Observe also here, that the greater the sufferings are (how small are ours on this account!) as the fruits of this love for the objects of the counsels of God, the greater is our privilege, the more do we participate in that which was the glory of Christ here below.

This thought sustains the soul in affliction of this kind: one has the same object as the Lord Himself. The energy of love in preaching the gospel addresses itself to the whole world. Perseverance, in the midst of affliction and difficulties and desertion, is sustained by the feeling that one is laboring for the accomplishment of God’s counsels. One endures all things for the elect, for God’s elect, in order that they may have salvation and eternal glory. This feeling was in Paul’s heart. He knew the love of God, and he sought — at the cost of whatever suffering it might be in the tumultuous sea of this world — that they who were the objects of the same love should enjoy the salvation and the glory which God bestowed. This was a faithful saying, that is, that which he had just declared; for if we should die with Christ, we should also live with Him; if we should suffer, we should also reign with Him. If any denied Him, He would also deny them; the consequences of such an act remained in all their force, they were linked with the immutability of His nature and His being, and were displayed in the authority of His judgment; He could not deny Himself because others were unfaithful.

Timothy was strengthened to maintain these great principles, which belonged to the moral nature of the Lord, and not allow himself to be drawn aside by speculations which only subverted souls and corrupted the faith. He was to show himself a workman approved of God, one who, being filled with the truth, and knowing how to unfold it in its various parts, according to the mind and purpose of God, would not be ashamed of

his work in the presence of those who might judge it. The profane and useless thoughts of human speculation he was to avoid. They could not but go on to produce ungodliness. They might have a great show of depth and height (as in the case of the assertion, that the resurrection had already taken place, which in a fleshly way went beyond all bounds with regard to our position in Christ) these doctrines which eat like a canker. Those of whom the apostle spoke had already overthrown the faith of some, that is, their conviction as to the truth and profession of the truth. But here the soul of the apostle found its refuge in that which is immutable, be the failure of the assembly or man's unfaithfulness ever so great. The sure foundation of God remained. It had this seal: the Lord knew them that were His. This was God's side, which nothing could touch.* The other was man's: he who professed the name of the Lord was to depart from all iniquity. This was man's responsibility, but it characterised the work and fruit of grace wherever that work was genuine and the true fruit born.

[* This, while a profound source of comfort, is a proof of decline; for men ought to know who are the Lord's too. It is not, "The Lord added daily to the assembly such as should be saved."

But here we have distinct evidence of the state of things which this epistle contemplates: namely, that the outward assembly had taken quite a new character, very different from that which it had at the beginning; and that now the individual was thrown upon his personal faithfulness as a resource, and as a means of escape from the general corruption. The sure foundation of God remained — His divine knowledge of those that are His; and individual separation from all evil; but the outward assembly assumes, in the eyes of the apostle, the character of a great house. All kinds of things are found in it, vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor, precious and vile. The man of God was to purge himself from the latter, to stand apart and not defile himself with that which was false and corrupt. This is a principle of all-importance, which the Lord has given us in His word. He allowed the evil to display itself in apostolic times, so far as to give occasion for the establishment of this principle by revelation, as that which was to govern the Christian. The unity of the assembly is so precious, it has such authority over the heart of man, that there was danger, when failure had set in, lest the desire for outward unity should induce even the faithful to accept evil and walk in fellowship with it, rather than break this unity. The principle therefore of individual faithfulness, of

individual responsibility to God is established, and set above all other considerations; for it has to do with the nature of God Himself, and His own authority over the conscience of the individual. God knoweth them that are His: Here is the ground of confidence. I do not say who are. And let those that name the name of Jesus separate themselves from all evil. Here I get what I can recognise. To maintain in practice the possibility of union between that name and evil is to blaspheme it.

The whole of that which calls itself christian is looked at here as a great house. The Christian is of it outwardly, in spite of himself; for he calls himself a Christian, and the great house is all that calls itself christian. But he cleanses himself personally from every vessel which is not to the Lord's honor. This is the rule of christian faithfulness; and thus personally cleansed from fellowship with evil, he shall be a vessel unto honor fit for the Master's use. Whatsoever is contrary to the honor of Christ, in those who bear His name, is that from which he is to separate himself.

Discipline for individual faults is not the subject here, nor the restoration of souls in an assembly that has in part lost its spirituality; but a line of conduct for the individual Christian in respect of that which dishonors the Lord in any way.

These instructions are solemn and important. That which makes them needful is sorrowful in its nature; but it all helps to exhibit the faithfulness and grace of God. The direction is plain, and precious when we find ourselves in similar circumstances. Individual responsibility can never cease.

When the Holy Ghost acts energetically and triumphs over the power of the enemy, these individuals who are gathered together in the assembly develop their life in it according to God and His presence, and the spiritual power which exists in the whole body acts upon the conscience, if needed, and guides the heart of the believer: so that the individual and the assembly flow on together under the same influence. The Holy Ghost, who is present in the assembly, sustains the individual at the height of God's own presence. Strangers even are obliged to confess that God is there. Love and holiness reign. When the effect of this power is no longer found in the assembly, and by degrees Christendom no longer answers to the character of the assembly as God formed it, yet the responsibility of the individual

to God has not ceased on that account. It can never either cease or diminish, for the authority and the rights of God Himself over the soul are at stake.

But in a case like this, that which calls itself Christian is no longer a guide, and the individual is bound to conform himself to the will of God, by the power of the Spirit, according to the light he has from it.

God may gather the faithful together. It is grace on His part; it is also His mind. But individual responsibility remains — responsibility not to break the unity, feeble as it may be, wherever it is possible according to God: but responsibility to preserve the divine character of Christianity in our walk, and to respond to the revelation we have received of His nature and of His will.

By purging himself from all those who are unto dishonor, the servant of God shall be unto honor, sanctified and prepared for every good work. For this separation from evil is not merely negative; it is the effect of the realisation of the word of God in the heart. I then understand what the holiness of God is, His rights over my heart, the incompatibility of His nature with evil. I feel that I dwell in Him and He in me; that Christ must be honored at all costs; that that which is like Him alone honors Him; that His nature and His rights over me are the only rule of my life. That which thus separates me unto Him, and according to what He is, separates me thereby from evil. One cannot walk with those who dishonor Him, and at the same time, honor Him in one's own walk.

That which follows shows the sanctifying character of this exhortation. The apostle says, "Flee also youthful lusts; but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." This is to breathe the pure atmosphere which is found in the Lord's presence; in which the soul enjoys health and strength. All that corrupts is far away. And, further, we find, what is so often contested, that we can and are to distinguish those who call on the name of the Lord out of a pure heart. We do not decide who are the Lord's: He knows them. But we are to associate ourselves with those who manifest themselves, such as call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Those I am to know, own, and walk with. The statement that I cannot know who these are, is in defiance of an

express rule of scripture, applicable to a state where, through corruption, many who may possess Christianity are not so manifested.

As we find throughout these epistles, the apostle exhorts to avoid vain questions, in which there is no divine instruction. They only produce barren discussions and strife; and the servant of the Lord is not to strive. He comes, on God's part, to bring the truth in peace and love. He is to maintain this character in the expectation that God, in His grace, will give repentance to those who oppose (for it is the heart and conscience that are in question), that they may acknowledge the truth.

The truth of God is not a thing of human understanding; it is the revelation of that which God is, and of His counsels. Now we cannot have to do with God without the heart and conscience being engaged. It is not the revelation to us of God, if this is not the case. Christians are brought into connection with the divine Being Himself, and in acts which ought to have the most powerful effect on the heart and conscience; if they do not, both the one and the other are in a bad state and hardened. The Spirit of God, no doubt, acts on the understanding and by it; but the truth lodged in it is addressed to the conscience and to the heart, and if these are not reached by the truth, nothing is done. Nor indeed is anything really understood till they are. For in divine truth things are understood before words, as "born again" (compare John 8:43). On the other hand, by means of error, by occupying the mind with the error, Satan shuts God out of it, and leads the whole man captive, so that he does the will of that enemy to the soul.

Now this evil influence would too surely be exercised. The power of the holy truth of God would be lost in the assembly and among Christians; and those who bore this name would become (under the influence of the enemy) the expression of the will and passions of man, while still maintaining the forms of godliness; a peculiar condition, which betrays in a remarkable way the influence and the work of the enemy. This was to be expected; and they would be perilous days.

The open opposition of the enemy is doubtless a painful thing, but he deceives souls by the specious appearances of which the apostle here speaks — that which bears the name of Christianity, that which before men has the character of godliness, and which the flesh will accept as such much more readily than that which, because it is true godliness, is contrary

to the flesh. Nevertheless all the worst features of the human heart are linked with the name of Christianity. What then does the testimony become? It is, so to speak, an individual prophecy, clothed in sackcloth.

There is activity in this perilous evil of the last days: these deceivers would creep into houses, and gain the ear of feeble souls, who, governed by their passions, are ever learning yet never learn. Teachers like these resist the truth, they are men of corrupt minds, reprobate as to the faith; but they shall proceed no farther. God will make manifest their folly and their falseness by means even of their own pretensions, which they can no longer maintain.

The man of God is to turn away from such men, while they are yet deceiving and exercising their influence. God will expose them in due time. All will then judge them, and condemn their pretensions; the spiritual man does so while they are deceiving the others in security.

We may remark here that which evidences the sad and dangerous character of the days of which the apostle is speaking. If we compare the lists of sins and abominations, which Paul gives at the beginning of the epistle to the Romans, as characterising heathen life and the moral degradation of men during those times of darkness and demon-worship, with the catalogue of sins that characterise those who have the form of godliness, we shall find that it is nearly the same, and morally quite the same; only that some of the open sins which mark the man who has no outward restraint are wanting here, the form of godliness precluding them and taking their place.

It is a solemn thought, that the same degradation which existed among heathens is reproduced under Christianity, covering itself with that name, and even assuming the form of godliness. But in fact it is the same nature, the same passions, the same power of the enemy, with but the addition of hypocrisy. It is only the departure from, and corruption of, the true doctrine of the Mediator; as Paganism was that of the true doctrine of the only God.

Different directions are given for the conduct of the man of God, with regard to the vessels unto dishonor, and the men who act in the spirit of the last days. From the former he is to purge himself: he is to think of faithfulness in his own walk; and by cleansing himself from those vessels

which do not honor the name of Christ, which (although in the great house) do not bear the stamp of a pure desire for His glory, he shall be a vessel unto honor, fit for the Master's use. By keeping apart from such vessels, he is sheltered from the influences that impoverish and degrade the testimony he has to render to Christ, he is pure from that which deteriorates and falsifies that testimony.

In the other case — that of the men who gave the character of “perilous” to the last days, the corrupt opposers of the truth, bearing the name of godliness — with regard to these his testimony is to be distinct and plain. Here he is not merely to cleanse himself; he testifies his moral abhorrence, his loathing, of those who, being the instruments of the enemy, bear this character of formal piety. He turns away from them, and leaves them to the judgment of God.

Timothy had the walk and spirit of the apostle for his pattern. He had been much with him; he had seen, in times of trial, his patience and his sufferings, the persecutions he had endured; but the Lord had delivered him out of all. It would be the same with all who sought to live according to godliness, which is in Christ Jesus:* they should endure persecution. Evil men and seducers would wax worse and worse, deceiving others, and being, at the same time, deceived themselves.

[* We get the difference of the state of things in this case also. It is not all Christians who will be persecuted, but all who will live godly in Christ Jesus.]

The character of the last days is strongly marked here, and gives no hope for Christianity as a whole. The progress of evil is described as developing itself in two distinct characters, to which we have already alluded. The great house — Christendom as a whole — in which there are vessels to dishonor, from which we are to purge ourselves, and the positive activity of corruption, and of the instruments who propagate it and resist the truth, although they who corrupt themselves assume the form of godliness. Under this last aspect the wicked will go on growing worse and worse; nevertheless the hand of God in power will demonstrate their folly.

We may distinguish, in this second category, the general character of pride and corruptness in all who submit to this malignant influence, and those who themselves labor to extend it. Of the latter of this class, the apostle

says, are they who creep into houses. The character is that of the mass who are seduced; but there are seducers. These resist the truth, and their folly shall be manifested. It may be that God may demonstrate it, wherever there is faithfulness, in order to save His own from it; but, in general, their evil work will go on, and the seduction grow worse and worse, until the end, when God will make manifest the folly of those who have departed from Him, and given themselves up to the errors of the human mind, and labored to maintain and propagate them.

The apostle then tells Timothy of the safeguard on which he may rely to preserve himself, through grace, stedfast in the truth, and in the enjoyment of the salvation of God. Security rests upon the certainty of the immediate origin of the doctrine which he had received; and upon the scriptures received, as authentic and inspired documents, which announced the will, the acts, the counsels, and even the nature of God. We abide in that which we have learnt, because we know from whom we have learnt it. The principle is simple and very important. We advance in divine knowledge, but (so far as we are taught of God) we never give up, for new opinions, that which we have learnt from an immediately divine source, knowing that it is so. By a source immediately divine, I mean, a person to whom God Himself has communicated the truth by revelation with authority to promulgate it. In this case I receive what he says (when I know him to be such) as a divine communication. It is true that the scriptures always remain as a counter proof, but when — as in the case of the apostles — a man is proved to be the minister of God, gifted by Him for the purpose of communicating His mind, I receive what he says in the exercise of his ministry as coming from God. It is not the assembly that is in view in this case. It cannot be the vessel of divine truth directly communicated to it from God. Individuals are always that. We have seen that its part is to confess the truth when communicated, not to communicate it. But we here speak of a person to whom and by whom God immediately reveals the truth — such as the apostles and prophets. God has communicated to them, as elect vessels for this purpose, that which He desired to communicate to the world, and they have so communicated. None could do it who had not received it himself from God as a revelation: if this is not the case, the man himself has some part in it. I could not then say, “I know

of whom I have learnt it," as knowing that it came immediately from God and by divine revelation.

When God had something to communicate to the assembly itself, He did it by means of such persons as Paul, Peter, etc. The assembly is composed of individuals; it cannot receive a divine revelation in a mass, as the assembly, except it be by hearing in common a divine voice, which is not God's way. The Holy Ghost distributes to every one, severally as He will. There are prophets, and the Spirit says, "Separate unto me Barnabas and Paul." Christ has given gifts to men, some apostles, some prophets, etc. Accordingly the apostle says here, not "where," but "of whom" thou hast learnt these things.

Here, then, is the first foundation of certainty, strength, and assurance for the man of God with regard to divine truth. It has not been revealed to him immediately. It was Paul and other instruments, whom God chose for this special favor. But he knows of whom he has learnt it; even of one (here it was Paul) to whom it had been directly made known by inspiration, and who has authority from God to impart; so that they who learn of him know that it is divine truth, exactly as God communicated it (compare 1 Corinthians 2), and in the form in which He was pleased to communicate it.

There is another means, which has a character of its own; the scriptures, which are as such the foundation of faith to the man of God, and which direct him in all his ways. The Lord Jesus Himself said (speaking of Moses), "If ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" His words were the words of God; He does not contrast the authority of what He said with that of the written word, but the means of communication. God has been pleased to employ that means as a permanent authority. Peter says "No prophecy of scripture...." There have been many prophecies which are not written; they had the authority of God for those persons to whom they were addressed. For the word speaks more than once of prophets — who must therefore have prophesied — without communicating their prophecies to us. They were instruments for making known the will of God, at the moment, in order to guide His people in their actual circumstances, without its being a revelation necessary to the people of God at all times, or applicable either

to the world, to Israel, or to the assembly in all ages. It was not a general and permanent revelation from God for the instruction of the soul at all periods.

A multitude of things, spoken by Jesus Himself, are not reproduced in the scriptures; so that it is not only a question of from whom we have heard a truth, but also of the character of that which has been communicated. When it is for the permanent profit of the people or the assembly of God, God caused it to be written in the scriptures, and it abides for the instruction and the food of His children in all ages.

The expression, “knowing of whom thou hast learned them,” establishes us on personal apostolic authority, viewing the apostles as teachers authorised by the Lord. John says, “They who are of God hear us.” It is not necessary that scripture should be written by apostles; God has made known therein His will and the truth, and has committed the sacred deposit to His people for the profit of all ages. The scriptures have authority as such. And it is not that which, as a spiritual man, one may receive from them, that by which we have profited (as to application to one’s soul that is indeed all); but it is the entire holy scripture, such as we possess it, which has this authority.

From his childhood Timothy had read the holy scriptures; and these writings, such as he had read them as a child, guarded him — as divine authority — against error, and furnished him with the divine truths needful for his instruction. To use them aright, faith in Christ was requisite: but that which he used was the scripture known from his youth. The important thing to observe here is that the apostle is speaking of the scriptures, as they are in themselves, such as a child reads them; not even of that which a converted or spiritual man finds in them, but simply the holy writings themselves.

It may perhaps be said, that Timothy as a child possessed only the Old Testament. Agreed: but what we have here is the character of all that has a right to be called holy scripture. As Peter says as to the writings of Paul, these, “They wrest; as they do also THE OTHER SCRIPTURES.* From the moment that we acknowledge the New Testament as having a title to that name, its writings possess the same character and have the same authority as the Old Testament.

[* This too is the real sense of Romans 16:26, where we should read “by prophetic writings.”

The scriptures are the permanent expression of the mind and will of God furnished as such with His authority. They are His expression of His own thoughts. They edify, they are profitable: but this is not all — they are inspired. It is not only that the truth is given in them by inspiration. It is not this which is here stated. They are inspired.

The greater part of the New Testament is comprised in the first source of authority, “knowing of whom thou hast learnt them,” namely, all that which the apostles have written; because, in learning the truth therein, I can say I know from whom I have learnt it — I have learnt it from Paul, or from John, or from Peter, etc. But, besides this, being received as scriptures, they have the authority of divine writings, to which, as a form of communication, God has given the preference above the spoken word. They are the permanent rule by which every spoken word is to be judged.

In a word the scriptures are inspired. They teach, they judge the heart, they correct, they discipline according to righteousness, in order that the man of God may be perfect, that is, thoroughly instructed in the will of God, his mind formed after that will and completely furnished for every good work. The power for performing these comes from the actings of the Spirit. Safeguard from error, wisdom unto salvation, flow from the scriptures; they are capable of supplying them. We are to abide in that which we have learnt from the apostles, and to be governed by the writings of God.

Does this perfect and supreme authority of the scriptures set aside ministry? By no means; it is the foundation of the ministry of the word. One is a minister of the word; one proclaims the word — resting on the written word — which is authority for all, and the warrant for all that a minister says, and imparting to his words the authority of God over the conscience of those whom he teaches or exhorts. There is, in addition to this, the activity of love in the heart of him who exercises this ministry (if it be real), and the powerful action of the Spirit, if he be filled with the Holy Ghost. But that which the word says silences all opposition in the heart or mind of the believer.

It was thus that the Lord answered Satan, and Satan himself was reduced to silence.

He who does not submit to the words of God thereby shows himself to be a rebel against God. The rule given of God is in the scriptures; the energetic action of His Spirit is in ministry, although God can equally act upon the heart immediately by the word itself. Nevertheless ministry, since the revelations of God were completed, could not be an authority, or there would be two authorities; and if two, one must be a needless repetition of the other, or else, if they differed, no authority at all.

If the revelations were not complete, no doubt there might be more. The Old Testament left untold the history of Christ, the mission of the Holy Ghost, the formation of the assembly; because these facts not being yet accomplished could not be the subject of its historical and doctrinal instructions, and the assembly was not even the subject of prophecy. But all is now complete, as Paul tells us that he was a minister of the assembly to complete the word of God (Colossians 1:25). The subjects of revelation were then completed.

Observe, that the apostle insists, as a matter of responsibility, that Timothy should devote himself to his ministry with so much the more energy that the assembly was declining, and self-will in Christians was gaining the ascendancy; not that he throws any doubt upon its being a constant duty to do so at all times, whether happy or unhappy. The apostle, as we have seen, has two different periods in view; the decline of the assembly, which had already begun, and the still worse condition that was yet future. The special application of the exhortation here is to the first period, "Be instant," he says, "in season, out of season... for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine... and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

In how positive and distinct a way the apostle sets the fall of the assembly before us! Its impaired condition in his day was to him but a point of progress (according to his judgment in the Spirit) towards a yet more entire fall; when, although still calling itself christian, the mass of those who assumed the name of Christ would no longer endure the sound doctrine of the Holy Ghost. But, come what might, laboring with patience and diligence and energy as long as they would hearken, he was to be watchful,

to endure afflictions, to seek after souls still unconverted (a great proof of faith when the heart is burdened with the unfaithfulness of those within), and fully to exercise his ministry; with this additional motive, that apostolic energy was disappearing from the scene (chap. 4:6).

But there is yet something to notice at the beginning of this chapter. Fullness of grace, it is apparent, does not here characterise the epistle. His exhortation to Timothy is “before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the quick and dead at his appearing and his kingdom.” We have already spoken of this: the appearing of Jesus is in connection with responsibility; His coming is with the object of calling us to Himself in connection with our privileges. Here it is the first of these two cases; not the assembly, or the Father’s house, but God the appearing, and the kingdom. All that is in relation to responsibility, government, judgment, is gathered together in one point of view. The apostle however is not speaking of the assembly, nor does he throughout the epistle. The assembly moreover as such is not judged; she is the bride of the Lamb. Individuals are judged. Christendom which bears its name and responsibility, and necessarily so while the Holy Ghost is here below, is judged. We are warned of it in Ephesus (Revelation 2). Nay, judgment begins there. This is the assembly viewed as the house, not the body.

The portion of the assembly, and even of its members as such, is grace and not judgment. She goes to meet the Lord before His appearing. Here the apostle speaks of His appearing and His kingdom. It is as appearing in glory and clothed with the authority of the kingdom that He exercises judgment. The presentation of the assembly to Himself completes the work of grace with regard to that assembly. When the Lord appears, we shall appear with Him in glory; but it will be the glory of the kingdom (as we see in the transfiguration), and He will judge the living.

He will maintain the authority of His kingdom, as a new order of things, for a long period; and judgment will be exercised, if the occasion for it arises, during its whole continuance, for a king shall reign in righteousness; judgment and righteousness will be united. Before giving back this kingdom to God the Father, He judges the dead, for all judgment is committed to the Son. So that the kingdom is a new order of things founded on His appearing, in which judgment is exercised. The kingdom is founded by the

exclusion of Satan from heaven. It is established and its authority put in exercise at the appearing of the Lord.

The consciousness that this judgment is going to be exercised gives an impulse to love in the carrying out of ministry, gives it earnestness, and strengthens the hands by the sense of union with Him who will exercise it and also by the sense of personal responsibility.

The apostle uses his near departure as a fresh motive to exhort Timothy to the full exercise of his ministry. His own heart expands at the thought of that departure.

The absence therefore of apostolic ministry, so serious a fact with regard to the assembly's position, makes the duty of the man of God the more urgent. As Paul's absence is a motive for working out our own salvation with fear and trembling, so is it also a motive for him who is engaged in the work of the gospel to devote himself more than ever to his ministry, in order to supply as far as possible the lack of apostolic service by earnest care for souls, and by instructing them in the truth that he has learnt.

We cannot be apostles, or lay the foundation of the assembly. This is already done. But we may build upon that foundation by the truth which we have received from the apostle, by the scriptures which God has given us, by an unwearied love in the truth for souls. The foundation is not to be laid a second time. We give its value to the foundation, we give it its place, by building upon it, and by caring for the souls and the assembly, to which apostleship has given an ever-abiding place and foundation before God. This is what we have to do in the absence of the gift that lays the foundation.

The character that God appointed has already been stamped on the work: the one foundation has been laid. The assembly has its one and sole place according to the counsels of God. The rule given of God is in the word. We have but to act as the apostle leads according to the impulse already given by the Spirit. We cannot have apostolic authority: no one is an apostle in any such sense. This could not be, because we do not lay the foundation; it would be to deny that which has already been done. The foundation has been laid. We can labor according to the measure of our gift; and so much

the more devotedly, in proportion as we love the work which the apostle wrought and because he is no longer here to sustain it.

As to the apostle, he had finished his work; if others were unfaithful, he had been faithful. In the good fight of the gospel of God he had fought to the end, and successfully resisted all the attacks of the enemy. He had finished his course: it only remained for him to be crowned. He had kept the faith committed to him. The crown of righteousness, that is to say, the one bestowed by the righteous Judge who acknowledged his faithfulness, was laid up and kept for him. It was not till the day of retribution that he would receive it. We see plainly, that it is reward for labor and for faithfulness that is here meant. This — or its opposite — characterises the whole epistle, and not the privileges of grace.

The work of the Spirit through us is rewarded by the crown of righteousness, and every one will have a reward according to his labor. Christ brings us all according to the grace of God into the enjoyment of His own glory to be with Him and like Him. This is our common portion according to the eternal counsels of God; but a place is prepared by the Father and given by the Son according to the work wrought by the power of the Spirit in each believer in his particular position. It is not Paul only who will receive this crown from the righteous Judge; all who love the Lord's appearing will appear with Him in the glory that is personally destined to each, and that is adjudged to him when the Lord appears. Detached from this world, sensible that it is a perverse and rebellious one, feeling how much the dominion of Satan burdens the heart, the faithful long for the appearance of Him who will put an end to that dominion, to rebellion, oppression and misery, by bringing in — in His goodness, although by judgment — deliverance, peace, and freedom of heart, on the earth.

The Christian will share the Lord's glory when He shall appear: but this world also will be delivered.

We see here too that the privileges of the assembly as such are not the subject, but the public retribution manifested when Jesus shall appear to all; and the public establishment of His glory. The heart loves His appearing; not only the removal of evil, but the appearance of Him who removes it.

In that which follows we see what progress the evil had already made, and how the apostle counts upon the individual affection of his dear son in the faith. Probably there were good reasons for the departure of many, certainly for that of some; nevertheless it is true that the first thing that presents itself to the apostle's mind is the departure of Demas from purely worldly motives. The apostle felt himself isolated. Not only had the mass of Christians abandoned him, but his companions in labor had gone away. In the providence of God he was to be alone. He begs Timothy to come soon. Demas had forsaken him. The rest, from various motives, had quitted him; some he had sent away in connection with the work. It is not said that Demas had ceased to be a Christian — had publicly renounced the Lord; but it was not in his heart to bear the cross with the apostle.

In the midst of these sorrows a ray of grace and light shines through the darkness. The presence of Mark — whose service Paul had formerly refused, because he had shrunk from the perils of laboring among the Gentiles and had turned back to Jerusalem — is now desired by him, because he was useful for the ministry. It is most interesting to see, and a touching proof of the grace of God, that the afflictions of the apostle and the work of grace in Mark combine to set before us, as faithful and useful to Paul, the one who once had failed, and with whom the apostle would then have nothing to do. We also see the affections and confidence displayed in the smallest details of life. Full of power by the Spirit of God, the apostle is gentle, intimate, and confiding, with those who are upright and devoted. We see too that at the close of his life, devoted as he was, the occasion had presented itself for study (in connection assuredly with his work), and for writing that which he wished carefully to preserve — possibly his epistles.

This has an important place in scriptural instruction with regard to the life of the apostle. Paul was lost, so to speak, for the greater part, in the power of the Spirit; but when alone, with sober mind, he occupies himself intelligently and carefully about the things of God.

He warns Timothy with regard to a man who had shown his enmity, and puts him on his guard against him.

We see here also that the epistle bears the character of righteousness, grace having had its course. "The Lord," he says, "reward him according to his deeds." As for those who had not courage to stand by him, when he had to answer as a prisoner, he only prays for them. He had not been discouraged. His heart, broken by the unfaithfulness of the assembly, was strong in confessing the Lord before the world, and he can testify that, if forsaken by men, the Lord Himself stood with him and strengthened him. That he had to answer before the authorities was but an occasion to proclaim again in public that for which he was made a prisoner. Glorious power of the gospel where faith is in exercise! All that the enemy can do becomes a testimony, in order that the great, kings, those who were otherwise inaccessible, should hear the word of truth, the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The faithful witness was also delivered out of the lion's mouth. His strong and simple confidence counted on the Lord to the end. He would preserve him from every evil work unto His heavenly kingdom.

If the time of his departure was at hand, if he had to fall asleep instead of being changed, he had not ceased to be among those who looked for the Lord's appearing. Meanwhile he was going to be with Him, to have a place in the heavenly kingdom.

He salutes the brethren with whom Timothy was connected, and begs him to come before the winter. We also learn here, that the miraculous power granted to the apostles was exercised in the Lord's service, and not for their private interests, nor as their personal affection might suggest; for Paul had left Trophimus sick at Miletus.

It is evident that this epistle was written when the apostle thought his departure near at hand, and when the faith of Christians had grievously declined, which was proved by their having forsaken the apostle. His faith was sustained by grace. He did not hide from himself that all was going wrong: his heart felt it — was broken by it; he saw that it would grow worse and worse. But his own testimony stood firm; he was strong for the Lord through grace. The strength of the Lord was with him to confess Christ, and to exhort Timothy to so much the more diligent and devoted an exercise of his ministry, because the days were evil.

This is very important. If we love the Lord, if we feel what He is to the assembly, we feel that in the latter all is in ruin. Personal courage is not weakened, for the Lord remains ever the same, faithful, and using His power for us: if not in the assembly which rejects it, it is in those who stand fast that He will exercise His power according to the individual need created by this state of things.

May we remember this. Insensibility to the state of the assembly is not a proof that we are near the Lord, or that we have confidence in Him; but in the consciousness of this ruin, faith, the sense of what Christ is, will give confidence in Him amidst the ruin which we mourn. Nevertheless it will be observed, that the apostle speaks here of the individual, of righteousness, of judgment, and not of the assembly. If the latter is spoken of outwardly as the great house, it contains vessels to dishonor, from which we are to purge ourselves. Yet the apostle foresaw a still worse state of things — which has now set in. But the Lord can never fail in His faithfulness.

The first of Timothy gives directions for the order of the assembly; the second, for the path of the servant of God when it is in disorder and failure.