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COMMENTARY

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

by John Nelson Darby

Books For The Ages
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John Nelson Darby, 1800-1882

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1 TIMOTHY

The epistles to Timothy and Titus have naturally a peculiar bearing and character, being addressed to persons deputed by the apostle to act in his name, or to care for the churches during his absence. Their application to us is none the less direct on this account, because they not only instruct us with regard to the state of the church, and the pastoral care which the apostle bestowed on it, but the line of conduct in which Timothy is charged to lead the faithful is that which the faithful ought always themselves to follow. Nevertheless to confound the directions given to Timothy and Titus with the words addressed immediately to the faithful, would be to cast confusion upon ministry in its best sense.

A great part of this first epistle to Timothy requires but little development; not because it is without importance, but because it contains directions — so plain and simple that explanation would be superfluous — and practical exhortations which would only be obscured and their force and point taken away by attempting to enlarge upon them.

On the other hand, some general principles of great importance for the position of the assembly in general are contained in this epistle.

God assumes here, in a peculiar way, the character of a Savior-God with regard to the world: a principle of great importance in all that concerns our conversation in the world and our intercourse with men. We represent in our religious character a God of love. This was not the case in Judaism. He was indeed the same God; but there He took the character of a Lawgiver. All were indeed to come to His temple according to the declaration of the prophets, and His temple was open to them; but He did not characterise Himself as a Savior-God for all. In Titus we find the same expression.

In these confidential communications to his dear children in the faith, and companions in the work, we can understand that the apostle would clearly establish the great principles on which the administration committed to him rested. That all men were the objects of God's dealings in grace was the general basis on which this administration was founded — that the character of God towards the world was that of a Savior (compare 2

Corinthians 5). The law has its place and it still has it, as the apostle shows — the conviction of unrighteous men.* But the sovereign mercy of God was the starting-point of all that the apostle had to declare. This thought, this spirit, was to govern the worship even of believers. Details follow. Notwithstanding this love to the world, there was upon the earth an assembly of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth, and the witness to it on earth. The Person of Christ, and all that concerns Him, is the subject of its confession, the foundation of its existence, and the object of its faith. This faith would be assailed in the last days by the enemy, who, under the pretense of sanctity, would set himself up against God the Creator and Preserver of all men and of believers in particular. Directions for the walk of the assembly compose the remainder of the epistle. Conduct suitable to all is set before Timothy to make him, as well as ourselves, understand that which befits the assembly of God. We will now look more closely into the contents of this epistle.

[* Not here, specially, that any one is under it, or that it is a rule of life for a people of God, but a rule of right and wrong to demonstrate evil to any conscience. In verse 5 we have the end of the commission of the gospel on the other hand, partaking of the divine nature — love and holiness, acting up to responsibility, a good conscience and the heart fully devoted to God, receiving His word and trusting Him.]

From its commencement the apostle designates God as the Savior-God. Paul is the apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Savior. The Lord Jesus Christ is the confidence and the hope of the soul.

We observe also that the apostle's wish differs from that which he expresses when addressing an assembly; "Grace, mercy," he says, "and peace." He does not say "mercy" to the assemblies, which stand before God as such, in consequence of the mercy shown them, and which (however low their condition might be) are viewed as assemblies according to the nature in which they live by the Spirit, in which there is no question of mercy, because that nature is itself of God. Grace and peace are that which they are to enjoy on the part of God. But when an individual is in question, whatever his piety or faithfulness may be, he is both flesh and spirit, his career has yet in part at least to be provided for, having always need of mercy. Therefore the apostle wishes it to Timothy as well as to Titus.* In the case of Philemon he adds "the church in thy house," and his wish has therefore no longer the personal form. But with Timothy and

Titus it is the apostle's intimacy with his beloved fellow-laborers. He knew how much they needed mercy. It was his own resource, that which he had experienced for the comfort of his own soul.

[* There is, however, some question as to the reading in Titus.]

The special object for which Paul had left Timothy at Ephesus, when he went into Macedonia, was that he might watch over the doctrine which was taught; but, being there, he gives him directions for the interior order of the assembly. the evil which the enemy sought to introduce, with regard to doctrine, had a twofold character; fables of human imagination, and the introduction of the law into Christianity. As to the former, it was pure evil and edified no one. The apostle does not here say much about it; he forewarned them of the evil; and the faith of the assembly at Ephesus was sound enough to allow him to treat the whole system as mere fables and genealogies. The Spirit gave warning, that in later times it would have more disastrous consequences; but at present there was only need to guard the faithful from it as that which was worthless. Timothy was charged by the apostle to attend to this.

But that which is committed to us in Christianity, as service, is always, both in its object and its character, at the height of the eternal principles of God, and belongs to the foundation of our moral relations with Him.

The object of Paul's mandate is the love of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned, and never the subtleties of argument or of human imagination. This is a sure token for souls that are sound in the faith and guided by the Spirit of God. Speculative questions do not act on the conscience, nor bring into the presence of God. Some had forsaken these great landmarks of Christianity, turning aside to vain discussions. And here we again find those same corrupters of Christianity, who, after having rejected the Savior, sowed the apostle's path with thorns — Judaising teachers. They desired to inculcate the law. The human mind is adequate to this.

Now we see here the way in which one who is at the height of the truth of God can put everything in its true place. Paul treats the produce of human imagination as mere fables, but the law was of God, and could be made useful if rightly employed. It was of great service to condemn, to judge

evil, to slay — to show the judgment of God against every wrong thing forbidden by the gospel which revealed the glory of the blessed God — a glory which tolerated no evil and which had been committed to the apostle. It could be used to act upon the conscience in this way, but it did not build up the righteous; and, if any were under the law, they were under the curse. As a sword for the conscience, it may be used. But grace alone is the source of our preaching and the stay of our souls.

These two systems and their respective places are presented in verses 5-17, which form a kind of parenthesis, the apostle resuming his address to Timothy in verse 18. The use of the law is explained in verses 8-13. The apostle in a certain sense lowers it here, while acknowledging its utility in its place, as the weapon of righteousness for condemnation, and contrasts it with the gospel which is connected with the glory of God Himself which this gospel proclaims, as the law is connected with the wickedness which it condemns.

Having spoken of the gospel of the glory which had been committed to him, the apostle turns to the sovereign grace that brought him into the knowledge of this glory which is the testimony to the accomplishment of the work of grace.

“I give thanks,” he says, “to Jesus Christ our Lord, who hath counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer and persecutor and injurious.” This indeed was grace.

The apostle speaks of two things in his conversion: the one, how God could have compassion on him in such a state — he was in ignorance; the other, the purpose of God that the apostle should be a pattern of grace to all. That he was in ignorance and unbelief, although a condition which made mercy possible (for had he been an enemy, knowing and willing it, while acquainted with the grace of the gospel, it would have been impossible), yet that condition was no excuse for his sin; he puts pure and perfect grace forward, as having abounded in his case — he was the chief of sinners. This indeed was true. The high priests had resisted the Holy Ghost to the uttermost. Paul had joined them in it: but he was not satisfied with that. He desired to be the active enemy of the faith wherever it existed, and to destroy the name of Jesus. He had done much at Jerusalem, but he wished to satiate his hatred even in foreign cities. We know his history in the

Acts. The living expression of Jewish resistance to grace, he was also among men the expression of the most active human enmity to Him whom God would glorify. Grace was greater than the sin, the patience of God more perfect than the perseverance of man's hostility. The latter was limited by man's importance, the former has no limit in the nature of God but that of His own sovereign will. Guilty as man may be, his sin cannot so reach God as to disturb the independent action of His nature or change His purposes. He was pleased to show forth in Paul a pattern of the sovereignty of that grace and perfect goodness — to the Jews hereafter, who as a nation will be in Saul's condition — to all men as the enemies of God and by nature children of wrath. The chief, the most active, the most inveterate of enemies was the best and most powerful of witnesses that the grace of God abounded over sin, and that the work of Christ was perfect to put it away.

“Unto God” — being such in His nature, and having the development of all the ages in His counsels — “unto the only God, invisible, incorruptible,” he ascribes all praise and all glory. Such was the foundation of Paul's ministry in contrast with the law. It was founded on the revelation of grace; but it was a revelation connected with the experience of its application to his own case. Peter, guilty of denying a living Savior, could speak to the Jews of grace that met their case, which was his own; Paul, formerly the enemy of a glorified Savior and the resister of the Holy Ghost, could proclaim grace that rose above even that state of sinfulness, above all that could flow from human nature — grace that opened the door to the Gentiles according to God's own counsels, when the Jews had rejected everything, substituting the heavenly assembly for them — grace that sufficed for the future admission of that guilty nation to better privileges than those which they had forfeited.

Such was the call of this apostle, such his ministry. Having shown the opposition between that which was committed to him and the law (while affirming the usefulness of the latter, not as a rule to the righteous, or a guide to God's people, but as judging wrong), he resumes his address to Timothy in that which refers to the details of his mission among the Ephesians

At the end of chapter 1 he commits the charge to him — sends him his mandate. The term he employs relates to verses 3 and 5. He had left Timothy at Ephesus in order to command some persons there not to teach other doctrines than the truths of the gospel. Now the end of the command, of this evangelical commission, was love flowing from a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned. For the gospel, while revealing the marvelous counsels of God, maintains the great eternal principles of His nature. It is this which distinguishes truth from the lofty pretensions of heretical imaginations; it requires that man should be in relationship with God really in heart and in truth according to those principles. And this commission the apostle now entrusted to Timothy, his own son in the faith. He was to maintain it with an authority that had its basis in divine testimony, but which he held formally from the apostle who appointed him to it; not merely of his own accord, but according to prophecies which had pointed him out for this purpose, and which were a means of strength to him in the conflict he was thus brought into. The conditions of victory were in accordance with the nature of the commission. He was to keep the faith and a good conscience. Now faith here is the doctrine of Christianity; yet not merely as doctrine, but as that which the soul held between itself and God as coming from Him. He had to maintain the truth, the christian doctrine, but to hold it as so revealed by God Himself to the soul that it should be the truth. The light should possess, with well-defined outlines, the authority of God.

It was the faith, that which God had revealed, received with certainty as such — as the truth.

But, to be in communion with God, the conscience must be good, must be pure; and if we are not in communion with God, we cannot have the strength that would maintain us in the faith, that would enable us to persevere in the profession of the truth, as God gives it to us. Satan has then a hold upon us, and if the intellect of one in this state is active, he falls into heresy. The loss of a good conscience opens the door to Satan, because it deprives us of communion with God; and the active mind, under Satan's influence, invents ideas instead of confessing the truth of God. The apostle treats the fruit of this state as "blasphemies"; the will of man is at work, and the higher the subject, the more an unbridled will, possessed by the enemy, goes astray, and exalts itself against God, and against the

subjection of the whole mind to the obedience of Christ, to the authority of the revelation of God.

The apostle had delivered up two persons of this character to Satan — that is to say, outwardly. Though already deceived by him, they were not under his dominion as having power to torment and make them suffer. For in the assembly (when in its normal state) Satan has no power of that kind. It is guarded from it, being the dwelling place of the Holy Ghost, and protected by God and by the power of Christ. Satan can tempt us individually; but he has no right over the members of the assembly as such. They are within, and, weak as they may be, Satan cannot enter there. They may be delivered to him for their good. This may take place at all times — witness the history of Job. But the assembly ought to have the knowledge, and be the guardian and instrument of the accomplishment of the dealings of God with His own. Within the assembly is the Holy Ghost; God dwells in it as His house by the Spirit. Without is the world of which Satan is the prince. The apostle (by the power bestowed on him,* for it is an act of positive power) delivered these two men into the power of the enemy — deprived them of the shelter they had enjoyed. They had listened to the enemy — had been his instruments. It was not in the assembly, with members of Christ, that this should have taken place. They must be made to feel what he was to whom they had given ear. God thus made use of Satan himself as a rod for the good of His rebellious children. Satan should instruct them, through the pains he would make them suffer, of whatever kind it might be, whether anguish of soul or of body, and the latter is the immediate effect, in order that their will might be broken and brought into subjection to God. Solemn discipline! Marvellous power in the hands of man! but a proof that the love of God can order all things for the purpose of delivering a soul and bringing it to Himself.

[* We must not confound this act of power with discipline, which is the act of the assembly and its formal duty. In 1 Corinthians 5 the apostle joins the assembly to himself in this act of power, but he delivered with the power of Christ. The duty of the assembly is stated there in verse 13. As to the saints' or assembly's part, when God has exercised discipline, see 1 John 5:16; James 5:14, 15.]

The apostle proceeds to give instructions, founded on the great principles which he had established — on grace. The Jewish spirit might look on Gentile kings as enemies, and on Gentiles in general as unworthy of divine

favor. The persecution of which Christians were the object gave the flesh occasion to nourish these dispositions and to enter into the spirit of the law. Grace rises above all these thoughts — all these feelings of the heart. It teaches us to think of all men with love. We belong to a Savior-God, who acts in the gospel towards all men with love. Especially were they to pray for kings and those who had places in the world, that God would dispose their hearts to allow us to live in peace and quietness in all honesty. This was well-pleasing to a Savior-God, who was willing that all men should be saved and be brought to know the truth. The subject here is not the counsels of God but His dealings with men under the gospel. He acts in grace. It is the acceptable time — the day of salvation. He opens the door through the blood of Christ, and proclaims peace and a sure reception to all who come. The work is done; His character fully glorified with regard to sin. If they refuse to come, that is the will of man. That God will fulfill His counsels after all makes no change in His dealings, nor in the responsibility of men. We have love to proclaim to all — in the spirit of love in our ways towards them. The distinction between Jew and Gentile totally disappears here. There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, a Man, Christ Jesus. These are the two great truths which form the basis of all true religion. Judaism had already been the revelation and testimony in the world of the first: there was one only God. This remains eternally true, but did not suffice to bring men into relationship with God. With regard to men He abode within the veil in the darkness which shrouded His majesty. Christianity, while fully revealing the one God, presents the second truth: there is one Mediator between God and men. There is one, and there is but one. It is as true that there is but one Mediator as that there is but one God. This is the great and distinctive truth of Christianity.

Two things here characterise the Mediator. He is a man; He gave Himself a ransom for all. The time for this testimony was ordered of God.

Precious truth! We are in weakness, we are guilty, we could not bring ourselves near to God. We needed a Mediator who, while maintaining the glory of God, should put us into such a position that He could present us to God in righteousness according to that glory. Christ gave Himself as a ransom. But He must be a man in order to suffer for men, and to represent men. And this He was. But this is not all. We are weak — here, where we

are to receive the revelation of God; and weak, with regard to the use of our resources in God and our communion with Him — even when our guilt is blotted out. And, in our weakness to receive the revelation of God, Christ has revealed God, and all that He is in His own Person, in all the circumstances wherein man could have need either in body or in soul. He came down into the lowest depths in order that there should be none, even of the most wretched, who could not feel that God in His goodness was near him and was entirely accessible to him — come down to him — His love finding its occasion in misery; and that there was no need to which He was not present, which He could not meet.

It is thus that He made Himself known on earth; and, now that He is on high, He is still the same. He does not forget His human experiences: they are perpetuated by His divine power in the sympathising feelings of His humanity, according to the energy of that divine love which was their source and their motive power. He is still a man in glory, and in divine perfection. His divinity imparts the strength of its love to His humanity, but does not set aside the latter. Nothing could resemble such a Mediator as this; nothing could equal the tenderness, the knowledge of the human heart, the sympathy, the experience of need. In the measure which divinity could give to what He did, and in the strength of its love, He came down, took part in all the sorrows of humanity, and entered into all the circumstances in which the human heart could be, and was wounded, oppressed, and discouraged, bowing down under the evil. No tenderness, no power of sympathy, no humanity, like His; no human heart that can so understand, so feel with us, whatever the burden may be that oppressed the heart of man. It is the Man, the Christ Jesus, who is our Mediator; none so near, none who has come down so low, and entered with divine power into the need, and all the need, of man. The conscience is purified by His work, the heart relieved by that which He was, and which He is for ever.

There is but One: to think of another would be to snatch from Him His glory, and from us our perfect consolation. His coming from on high, His divine nature, His death, His life as Man in heaven, all point Him out as the one and only Mediator.

But there is another aspect of this truth, and of the fact that He is a Man. It is, that He is not merely a Mediator as a Priest upon His throne, between Israel and the Lord; not simply the Messiah, in order to place Israel in relationship with their God, but a Man between God and men. It is according to the eternal nature of God Himself and to the need of men in His presence. It was of these truths, eternal and of universal bearing, that Paul was the herald and the apostle.

Possessing a character that belongs to all ages and that goes beyond them, all these facts had their time to be revealed.

All means dependent on man's use of them had been tried with men — and in vain, as to recalling him to God; and now the necessary foundations of their relationship with God had to be set forth, laid by God Himself, and the Gentiles were to hear the testimony of grace. And such was the apostle's testimony, "a teacher of the Gentiles in the faith and in the truth."

Paul has plainly now laid the foundations, and he proceeds therefore to details. Men were to pray everywhere, lifting up pure hands, without wrath, and without vain human reasonings. Women were to walk in modesty, adorned with good works, and to learn in silence. A woman was forbidden to teach or to exercise authority over men; she was to abide in quietness and silence. The reason given for this is remarkable, and shows how, in our relations with God, everything depends on the original starting-point. In innocence Adam had the first place; in sin, Eve. It was Eve who, being deceived, brought in transgression. Adam was not deceived, guilty as he was of disobeying God. United to his wife, he followed her, not deceived by the enemy but weak through his affection. Without the weakness, it was this which the second Adam did in grace; He followed His deceived and guilty bride, but in order to redeem and deliver her by taking her faults upon Himself. Eve suffered on earth the penalty of her fault in a way which is a mark of the judgment of God; but walking in modesty, with faith and love and holiness, she shall be delivered in the hour of her trial; and that which bears the stamp of judgment shall be an occasion of the mercy and succor of God.

The apostle next points out to Timothy the qualities necessary for a bishop or a deacon, as well as for the wife of the latter.* He supposes here

that there were some who desired to undertake this work. It was a good work. To care for souls and have a vigilant eye upon the walk of believers; to watch over them in order that the members of Christ should answer to His love and lose no christian privilege; to do this by maintaining that happy order and that precious unity which were realised at that time, and to protect the flock of the Lord against the ravaging wolves that were seeking to invade it: this indeed was valuable work, and he on whose heart the Lord had thus laid the souls of His people might well desire to undertake it. The apostle felt this: it was a true and faithful saying; but certain qualities were needed to make any one fit for such a charge. Gifts are not included among them, unless the being “apt to teach” might be so considered; but even this is presented as a quality — the man must have aptness** for it — not as a gift. Power to use such truth with others was very useful in fulfilling his charge, without saying at all that he taught publicly in the assembly. The essential thing was that which gave moral weight.

[* So it would read in English, but I see no reason why it should not apply to the elders’ (bishop’s) wives. It runs really thus, “In like manner the] deacons.... In like manner the] wives.”

[** Some translate this word, “ready to learn.”

Timothy was not left at Ephesus to appoint elders; but these were the qualities necessary to a bishop, and Paul exhorts him to be watchful on this point.

It is not needful to enter into the details of these qualities; they are plain enough, as well as those required for a deacon.

We see what was the subject of “the condemnation of the devil”: he exalted himself at the thought of his own importance (compare Ezekiel 28). “The snare of the devil” is another thing. If a man is not of good report, he will yield somewhere to the enemy, because he will not dare to withstand him boldly.

It will be noticed that the apostle speaks of the wives of deacons, and not those of bishops* (except to say that these must be the husbands of one wife only). Bishops had a charge, in which they were occupied with souls and exercised authority in the church, in which women were not to act. Deacons were necessarily occupied with family details and circumstances.

In these women might well be concerned and often very useful. In the spiritual cares of elders they had nothing to do. It was requisite therefore that the wives of deacons should possess qualities which would cause their husbands to be respected, and at the same time guard themselves from becoming busybodies and tale-bearers.

[* So it would read in English, but I see no reason why it should not apply to the elders' (bishop's) wives. It runs really thus, "In like manner the] deacons.... In like manner the] wives."

Faithfulness in the charge of a deacon — the exercise of which in fact is a matter of the greatest delicacy, and requires much christian love and patience — was a means of acquiring strength in the work of God. Stephen and Philip are examples of this: their spiritual powers soon carried them beyond their services as deacons.

What was the assembly in those happy days? That which surely it always is in the sight of God; but then in fact, when love displayed itself in an order maintained by the energy of the Holy Ghost, and when the oneness of the entire body developed itself in the action of all its members, it was the house of God. Thank God, it is so always; yet what a difference since then in its practical condition!

But let us here examine the character which the apostle gives to the assembly on earth. He wrote hoping soon to come, but in order that, in case he might tarry long, Timothy should know how to conduct himself. He then tells us what the assembly is.

In the first place it is the house of God. God dwells in it upon the earth (compare Ephesians 2:22). We understand that it is here viewed as on the earth, because the apostle is speaking of how to behave in it. But this truth is important. It gives a character to the assembly of the highest importance for us with regard to our responsibility. It is not a vague thing, composed of the dead, of the living — a thing which we know not where to find, because one part of it is alive on the earth and another part consists of souls in heaven. It is the house of God here below, in which we have to behave (whatever other position we may hold) in a manner that becomes the house of God. God dwells in the assembly upon earth. We cannot too earnestly remember this fact. Whatever would bring confusion into the presentation of the truth, through the idea that some are dead and that the

whole assembly is not here, comes from the enemy and is in opposition to the word. The assembly, viewed as subsisting on earth, is the house of God.

In the second place it is the assembly of the living God. God in whom is the power of life, in contrast with men and with dead idols, has an assembly not of the world, having set it apart for Himself. It is not a nation like Israel. That people were the assembly of God in the wilderness. The assembly is now the assembly of the living God.

In the third place it is the pillar and support of the truth. Christ on earth was the Truth. He is so always, but He was so on the earth. He is now hidden in God. The assembly is not the truth: the word of God is the truth. His word is truth. Truth exists before the assembly; it is faith in the truth which gathers the assembly together. But the assembly is that which maintains the truth on earth.* When the assembly is gone, men will be given up to a strong delusion.

[* But the assembly does not teach. Teachers teach the assembly, but by faithfulness in holding fast the truth taught, it sustains it in the world.]

It may be that there is only a little remnant of those that call themselves Christians who maintain the word of truth; but it is not the less true that the assembly — as long as it remains here below — is the only witness for the truth upon the earth. It is God's witness to present the truth before men. At the end that which God owns as such will be the feeble flock at Philadelphia; and then that which is in the responsible position of being the assembly (Laodicea) will be spued out of the mouth of Christ, who Himself takes the character of Amen, the faithful and true Witness. But the assembly as planted by God on the earth is the pillar and support of the truth. Authority is not the question here, but the maintenance and presentation of the truth. That which does not maintain and present the truth is not the assembly as God understands it.

The presence, then, of the living God, and the profession of the truth, are the characteristics of the house of God. Wherever this assembly of the living God is, wherever the truth is, there is His house.*

[* Thus, in order to judge what the assembly is, we must know and be able to distinguish the truth and the living God. It is this which the apostle says with regard to the individual, "the Spirit is truth." These are the cardinal

points with regard to unbelief and faith, the truth and the Spirit; and the word of God is the truth.]

The mystery of piety, which lies at the very center of what the assembly maintains before the world, is great, and relates essentially to the Person of Christ. The apostle naturally does not here develop all the different parts of the truth, but that which is the living center of the whole — that which is essential to the relations between God and men.

God had been manifested in the flesh; marvelous truth in fact! There, where all is confusion and sin, in the nature of him in whom all this sin and all this confusion are introduced, the Center of all blessing, He who is Light itself, He who as the light puts everything morally in its place, and who by the fact of His presence shows that love is above everything, God who is love, has been manifest in the flesh. Where sin was, there was love above the sin. Man, who is the slave of evil, sees here in his own nature the source and the power of all good. In the center of evil and of weakness, in human nature, God Himself has been manifested. Was there then evil in Him who was such? Did He undergo the lot of the common bondage? By no means. Truly in the same circumstances, in the same nature, He proved superior to all evil, perfect in all respects. The absence of all sin was made evident by the power of the Holy Ghost during His whole life (if men had been able to discern it; and, in fact, it was manifest to the conscience of every man, for He was pure light shining upon all), and with power by the resurrection (compare Romans 1:4).

Thus God was made visible to the angels, was preached to the Gentiles (not merely the God of the Jews), became the object of faith in the world (it was not the manifestation of visible power, claiming His rights and His glory), and at last took a place on high in the glory whence He had descended. It is thus that God is known in the assembly according to the truth. There is no truth outside the maintenance of this revelation of the Person of Christ.

It is worthy of notice that in this epistle, and even in the second, the apostle speaks nowhere of the relationship of Christians with God as His children, of the privileges of children, or of that which is known within in the intimacy of the family. He speaks of truths that are essential as testimony before the world; that which the assembly is externally, that

which it is as witness of God towards men. It is the house of God, the assembly of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth: that which it is as responsible in the world, and in order that all should learn what God is. The mystery of piety, of which the assembly is the vessel for testimony, answers to this. It is the grand essential truth on which all relation between God and men is founded, by means of which God has to do with men. Therefore also he says previously, “There is but one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”

We have not here the privileges of children, nor the heavenly bride of Christ, but the foundation of God’s relations with all men. Thus the Father is not named, nor even the Spirit, except here in connection with the Lord’s Person, as the justification of His testimony. It is God, the Mediator, and man, and the assembly as the vessel and depositary of this truth of the testimony of God; or else evil spirits turning men away from the faith. This deserves all attention.

Not only, as we have seen elsewhere, the testimony of the grace of the gospel maintains the great eternal principles of the nature and glory of God, and His relations according to that glory with men; but even in the pains the apostle takes that the assembly may be cared for and guarded, during his absence, from the assaults of the enemy and from disorder and improprieties within; it is not of its internal privileges that he speaks. God is set before us, and the Lord Jesus Christ. God, in the majesty of His immutable truth, in His relations with men as such, and in the revelation of Himself in the flesh — God was in Christ, reconciling the world; dwelling in the assembly, in order that it should present and maintain the truth before the world — the truth (as we have seen) with regard to Christ, of the revelation of God in Him. God desires to be in relation with men: it is thus that He accomplishes it. The assembly maintains the rights of the Creator and Savior-God on the earth. The assembly itself must be maintained in moral order, that it may confront the enemy who is in the world, and be able to sustain this testimony.

But there would be some who departed from the faith, from this knowledge of the one Creator and Savior-God — Him who was manifested in the flesh. They would attack precisely these points which we have named. It might be that they would pretend to carry the idea of christian

privileges farther than all others had done, as well as that of profound knowledge of God; but they would sin against first principles, against the faith which connected the Savior-God revealed in Christianity with the one only Creator-God. According to Christianity, the eternal God had not only created the world but had revealed Himself in Christ. These apostates, bringing in doctrines of demons, would seek to deny that it was this one and only God of nature who had manifested Himself in grace. Seduced by demons, and their conscience being seared, they forbade that which God had established in creation, that which He had given to man in full right after the flood: as though the superior holiness which they preached, and relationship with a more exalted God, were not consistent with such customs. Forsaking the real and practical holiness of communion with God, and of His commandments by Christ, they created a false sanctity for themselves, which denied that which God had ordained from the beginning, and thus exalted themselves against the authority of Him who had ordained it, as though He was an imperfect or perhaps evil being.

Thus the restraint of the fear of God was lost, and the door opened to licence and dissoluteness. The Spirit of God warned the assembly of this, and the faithful apostle communicates it to Timothy and through him puts the faithful on their guard. He does not therefore speak of privilege. Faithful to the glory of God, he returns to the first principles of His glory, and maintains the incontestable rights of the one and only God; faithful to God, not making boast of his knowledge, but seeking in love to guard the assembly from all departure from God.

We must not confound the few here who forsake the faith with the general apostasy of 2 Thessalonians. Here a few depart from the truth, seduced by demons; and the assembly still subsists to be guarded from the invasion of these hurtful principles. Quite another thing is the general apostasy, and the manifestation of the man of sin, which is not mentioned here at all.

Here we have the faithfulness which repels error by truth, reminding the brethren of the latter, in order that they may not be seduced. There it is the manifestation of the one who sits in the temple of God, and who is destroyed by the brightness of the Lord's presence. Here all that had to be done was to recall in simplicity the goodness of the Creator, and that His gifts, received with thanksgiving, were always good, and not to be refused:

assuredly not that they were to use them for the gratification of their lusts, but as sanctified by the word of God, which brought them to us as God's gifts, and by prayer, which connects us with God in using them. They were to be received as from Him, as the gift of His hand; and they were sanctified, as is the case with everything that comes from Him and bears the stamp of His will and His goodness. Man had forfeited everything in forsaking God: what he had he had not now with God, would eat merely as an animal, and worse as having left God. The word of God replaced the relationship in grace, and prayer used it on this footing. Here (although in other circumstances it has gone much farther) the monastic principle, in the heart and in form, is fully judged; however sincere any individual may be who seeks to follow it in order to honor God. God does not withdraw the gifts on which man, so to speak, has seized by his will; but his use of them, instead of being the gratification of his will and lusts, is now as received from God by His will in thankfulness, and owning Him.

This in fact the apostle shows in that which follows. By teaching thus Timothy would be a good servant of Jesus Christ, nourished in the truth: bodily exercise profited little, but godliness much — both here below and for eternity; warning him again against the idle and profitless speculation of the human mind, to the danger of which he continually recurs. It is for this doctrine of God — true and worthy of all acceptance — that the apostle labored and suffered reproach; because he had faith in the living God, who, by His providence and by His supreme power,* governed, preserved, and took care of all men, and especially of those that believed. It was this same only God, Creator and Savior, in whom he trusted while laboring for the Lord. Timothy was to teach this and enforce it with authority.

[* Compare Matthew 10:29.]

Afterwards, in connection with this authoritative instruction, the apostle speaks of the person and position of Timothy himself. He was young, but he was to maintain his place, and gain by his conduct that weight which years did not yet give him. He was to be an example to the believers, and occupy himself, till Paul came, with reading, exhortation, and instruction. Moreover, in his case God had given a special preparation for his work; he was not to forget or neglect it. A gift had been imparted to him: God had pointed him out to this end by prophecy; and this immediate testimony

from God, to which the operation of His power was united, had been accompanied by the seal of testimony from man, that is, that of the elders among the Christians (compare Acts 13:1-3).

Thus all things concurred to strengthen Timothy in his service, and in the authority that he exercised at that moment in place of the apostle. He should always present the weight of an irreproachable conduct, which would have its influence over hearts and consciences; but he was inwardly strengthened by the consciousness of having been formally set apart by God for the work; the gift of God had been imparted to him, and the sanction of all that had weight in the assembly had been laid, as a seal, upon him. Thus strengthened, he was to devote himself to the things of the Lord in such a manner, that his progress should be evident to all men — a demonstration of his communion with the Lord. At the same time he was to take heed to himself and to the doctrine, and that continually, which should be the means of salvation both to himself and to those who heard him.

Having thus considered the laborer, the apostle returns to the details of the work, in which Timothy was to display his diligence and watchful care. Everywhere here the subject is that which is suitable outwardly to an upright walk, that which is seemly, whether with regard to the position of individuals, or with respect to the world. The apostle speaks of elders; of widows, of that which is becoming for younger widows; of the honor due to faithful elders, those among them especially who were teachers also. There is nothing inward, nothing of the soul's relationships to God; but everything refers to the public testimony which suited the position of men in this world before God. It is important to remark this, that although our joy lies in our heavenly privileges, in our communion, yet we can never with impunity neglect ordinary duties or moral proprieties; we must take knowledge of the practical dangers that would beset us, owing to that which the flesh is.

We may notice that provision was made for all widows who had no relatives able to maintain them; and also that there were elders who did not teach.

Against an elder, Timothy was not to receive an accusation, unless there were two or three witnesses.

All this bears testimony to the fact, that the apostle gives these directions with a view to outward order; for the maintenance of that which is respectable in the eyes of all, and of respect for all that ought to be respected. At the same time, Timothy was to be careful not to give by the laying on of hands his sanction to any one who did not offer moral guarantees that, in the position he had taken, he deserved this mark of respect from others. It would be, on Timothy's part, to become a partaker in the sins of which such a one might be guilty. He was not to lay hands hastily on any one.

Some men's sins were open, and proclaimed beforehand the judgment that awaited them. The sins of others were hidden: they would find them again at the great day. But this was a reason why he should do nothing in his charge with precipitation; he was also to keep himself pure.

Timothy's habitual temperance is here seen: weak in body, the apostle recommends him to use his liberty by taking a little wine — a pleasing instance of grace. We have here a proof of the habits of this faithful servant. The Spirit shows us how carefully he kept himself from exciting or satisfying his passions in the least thing (at the same time that there is perfect liberty to use everything that is good when there is a true reason for it), and also the apostle's tender interest in his fellow-laborer in the gospel. It is a little parenthesis attached to the expression, "be not a partaker of other men's sins," but it has great beauty. This affectionate watchfulness became the apostle; he desired holiness in his representative, but he well knew how to respect Timothy, and to maintain the decorum which he had enjoined, and to exhibit his heartfelt tenderness. The 24th verse is connected with the 22nd.

The apostle then goes equally into detail with regard to servants, that is, slaves. They were to respect their masters, in order that the doctrine of the Lord should not be blasphemed.

When the masters were believers, there was naturally more familiarity, for they were one in Christ, and thence the danger (for the flesh is crafty) that the servants might not treat their masters with the respect due to them. The apostle guards against this abuse of christian love, and of the just intimacy and confidence which ought to exist between brethren; but which,

on the contrary, was a motive for the servant to render all honor to his master, by treating him with more love and with the same respect.

It was necessary that the apostle should be firm. All other instructional refusal to receive the wholesome words of christian doctrine, the words of Christ and the doctrine which is according to practical godliness — proceeded from the flesh, from human pride in those who wished to take advantage of godliness, and make it a means of gain. From such persons Timothy was to turn away. Godliness was indeed gain, if they were contented with what they had; and the Christian, who does not belong to this world, if he has food and raiment, ought to be content therewith. He brought nothing into this world, and will certainly carry nothing out of it. And the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil. Seduced by this covetousness, some had wandered away from christian faith, and had pierced their hearts with sorrow. The desire to be rich was the path of snares and temptation, of foolish and hurtful lusts. Timothy was to flee these things, as a man of God. This is always the thought here: he was in the world on the part of God; he represented Him for his part in the work. He was therefore to follow after other things than earthly riches — the character of a man of God — righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness: these were the things which, in man, presented God to the world and glorified Him.

Meanwhile there was conflict: he must fight the good fight of faith. If anyone represents God in the world, there must be warfare, because the enemy is there. The energy of faith was also necessary, in order to lay hold of eternal life in the midst of the seduction and difficulties which the “things that are seen” presented. God, moreover, had called Timothy to this, and he had made a good confession before many witnesses.

Finally, the apostle charges him most solemnly in the presence of God, the Source of life for all things, and of Christ Jesus who had Himself born witness without wavering before the powers of this world, placing him under the responsibility of keeping the commandment without spot, unrebukable until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It will be noticed here that, as Paul had not spoken in the epistle of the privileges of the assembly, but of its responsibility, so neither does he here speak of its being caught up but of its manifestation, when the fruits of

faithfulness (or of failure in it) will be gathered, and every one be in his place in the visible glory according to his work. All are like Christ, all enter into His joy; but to sit at His right and left hand in His kingdom is the portion of those for whom it is prepared by His Father, who bestows it according to the work which He has granted each to perform, giving him power to accomplish it, although in grace He reckons it as our own.

Christ Himself is here viewed as the faithful man (v. 13), whom God will manifest in glory before all creatures at the time ordained in His counsels.

All here is responsibility before the world, or glory as the result of that responsibility. The supreme, invisible God is maintained in His majesty; and He presents the Lord Jesus Christ in the creation as its center, and repository of His glory — He who dwells in light inaccessible, whom, in His divine essence man has not seen and cannot see.

This character of the epistle is very remarkable. Nowhere else is the inaccessible majesty of God, as God, thus presented. His character is often the subject of instruction and manifestation. Here He alone has essential immortality. He dwells in inaccessible light. He is ever invisible to the eyes of men. He alone has power. He has dominion over all who reign. It is God in the abstraction of His essence, in the proper immutability of His being, in the rights of His majesty, veiled to all men.

Now Christ will be the center of the visible glory. Having part in the divine glory before the world was, He displays, in the human nature in which He took part, this glory, which is rendered visible in Him, causing His own to participate in His joy and in all that He has in this character; but here, He is manifested by God, and in order that all should acknowledge Him.* And it is our responsibility, faithfulness to which will be manifested in that day, which is here set before us. However small may be our share of responsibility, it is of such a God as this that we are the representatives on earth. Such is the God before whom we are to walk, and whose majesty we are to respect immediately in our conduct, and also in our relations to all that He has made.

[* In Revelation 19 He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Here He who is so manifests Him. So in Daniel 7. The Son of man is brought to the Ancient of days, but in the same chapter the Ancient of days comes.]

The apostle concludes his exhortation to Timothy by engaging him to warn the rich not to rest on the uncertainty of riches, but on the living God who gives us richly all things to enjoy. It is still the supreme and Creator-God who is before our eyes. Moreover, they were to be rich in good works, and ready to give; to be rich in those dispositions which would be of value, which would lay up a store (this is but a figure) against the time to come; and to lay hold of that which really is life. The apostle repeats his urgent exhortation to Timothy to keep that which had been committed to him, to avoid profane and vain babblings, holding fast the sound and sanctifying truth, and to have nothing to do with oppositions of human science, which pretended to penetrate into divine things as though they were subject to its knowledge. This was the origin of the fall of many with regard to christian faith.

I do not doubt that, in the manner in which the apostle here sets God before us, he refers to the foolish imaginations to which, under the influence of the enemy, men were abandoning themselves. Thus he speaks of these with relation to the majesty of His Being as the one only God in whom is all fullness, and with regard to the sobriety of practical morality, which keeps the heart under the influence of that truth, and apart from the false and vain speculations in which the pride of man indulged itself. He maintained souls by the majesty of the only God, in the practical sobriety in which peace dwells.

Soon will the veil be drawn aside by the appearing of Jesus, whom the Almighty God will display to the world.