

COUNSEL
FOR THE
LAST DAYS

W. J. HOCKING

LONDON
C. A. HAMMOND
11 Little Britain, E.C.1
1945

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COUNSEL FOR THE LAST DAYS

The Substance of Two Addresses
delivered in 1909 and 1910
on
2 Timothy ii. 19 and iii. 14-17

by
W. J. HOCKING

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THE PERMANENCE OF DIVINE THINGS

THE FOUNDATION AND THE SEAL (NOTES OF AN ADDRESS)

" Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth. But shun profane babblings ; for they will proceed further in ungodliness, and their word will eat as doth a gangrene ; of whom is Hymenæus and Philetus ; men who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already ; and overthrow the faith of some. Howbeit the firm foundation of God standeth, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His, and, Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness "
(2 Tim. ii. 15-19, R.V.).

In the latter part of this scripture we have truth that has already been brought before us today. For we have been reminded what are our duty and responsibility in the present condition of the Christian profession. Only here we have a little more than a reminder of what is due from us. It is also needful for us to know what we have been made "in Christ," and what we inherit in the things that God has already given us and which we can never lose. If called to the path of duty we must have that which gives us strength for the task. It is no use to go to an anæmic person and merely tell him to have strength ; in his weakness he needs to be made strong, to have his " loins girt about with truth." Amid the wreck of Christendom what have we still remaining ? Do we not oftentimes find ourselves desponding because we look at what we have *not*, instead of what we have because it is secured to us " in Christ " ?

This Epistle was written in view of what had come upon the church in apostolic times. There were still those who had seen the fair scene in Jerusalem at Pentecost, when all were filled by one holy Personage, and were all of "one accord." The astonishing outward unity was true not only of Jewish believers in Jerusalem, but of Gentiles who were brought into the assembly. All forgot racial animosities, and the love of God was by the Holy Spirit shed abroad alike in all their hearts.

But how soon the brightness of visible Christian unity faded! In half a century it was gone. When Paul wrote his later Epistles, how much had come in to sadden his heart! It was a trial and a sorrow to such an energetic man to be shut up in Rome while tidings came in from all parts of the world that assemblies were departing from the faith, and saints forgot to love one another. Disciples turned away from him, neglected his teaching, and were ashamed of his chain! If so then, what now? Men then were erring from the truth and worse was to come. But God's providence overruled this for our profit, that in the counsel given for that day we might have guidance in paths of similar difficulty.

Hence we have words in this Epistle which send a flash of light over the dark waters of strife and confusion. Men of that day were misconstruing the word of God; and it was needful for a workman, if he did not wish to be ashamed, to handle it rightly, and present himself "approved unto God" (ver. 15). It is a solemn thing to take the scissors and the paste and seek by removing here and adding there to improve the word of God. Let us heed the warning of the apostle, and be careful to divide or handle rightly the word of truth. Some whom Paul knew had missed the mark. People like something new, and so did Hymenæus and Philetus. They talked of the resurrection as having taken place already, and their "profane babblings" overthrew the faith of some. A man who speaks to others on any subject takes a great

responsibility upon himself, but how much greater do those take who speak of the word of God?

The Foundation

But the apostle has a word of cheer and comfort, which is found in the last verse I read. "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure," or, as it should read, "Howbeit the firm foundation of God standeth." I think it is a needed word of assurance at all times; and from what has been before those assembled here today it is clear that the encouragement is intensely needed at this time. In face of the disturbing apostasy the apostle turns to what is immovable and imperishable. Never mind, Timothy, the fables of Hymenæus and Philetus; you have the firm foundation which God has established and which abides evermore. In spite of all that is bewildering at the present time, this fact is as true and fresh today as ever; and there is as much power in it as ever. We need not want to go back to Pentecost. What have we got now? The foundation of God. What is it? Because it is not defined in the passage people begin to speculate. You have only to consult commentators to see what confusion is the result. Some would refer you to a concordance. A concordance is excellent when used as it should be, but it is not a substitute for the Bible. It will help you to find parallel references to a text, but it will not give you its meaning, nor provide its interpretation.

The foundation, I believe, refers here to that which God has established for the comfort of our souls. It is not one thing or another specifically, but a general term which comprehends all those things He has given us in Christ Jesus. But three things are specially prominent among those secured to us in these days, and they have all been before us at various times today. In Haggai ii. 4 we have Jehovah's promise, "I am with you." The New Testament answer to this is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ in all His fulness and sufficiency, Whose perpetual presence is guaranteed to His own. And, blessed be God, the brightness

of His promised presence is not dimmed today. The prophet spoke also of the Spirit and the word of God (ii. 5). And we still have all three—the Son of God, the Spirit of God, the word of God.

Think now what this implies to me and to you. We have Christ as He was given to the church at the beginning. Take an instance from John's Gospel. In chapter v. the Lord is spoken of as the Giver of life, while in chapter vi. He is the Supporter of that life, its bread. And the believer whose hunger has been satisfied is the one who knows how to continue to eat His flesh and drink His blood (ver. 56). What else but the appropriation of the Christ Who died can give support to the soul in days like this? We look back on One Who was ceaselessly active when here amid a "faithless and perverse generation," yet abiding in unbroken communion with the Father; and we have the privilege of hearing His words and seeing His actings to all sorts and conditions of men. As we read of these things our souls are fed, encouraged and enlightened. In chapter x. we see the Shepherd Who cares for the one excommunicated sheep of chapter ix., as well as His "one flock." When through faithfulness to Him we find ourselves cast out and alone, is He not at hand to welcome us? He is the same Good Shepherd today as ever.

In chapter xiii. we have infinite comfort. The Lord Jesus Christ just before He was crucified is in the midst of His own. They are only a very few, but a Judas is there, so callous, and a Peter is there, so self-confident. But are His loving words affected by what He sees in their hearts? He speaks to lead them on in the knowledge of Himself, liable as they are to carnal and worldly temptation; and by words and illustration intended to fasten the truth on their hearts He washes their feet, removing the defilements of the way. Amid all the confusion and failure of the present time we have One Who acts for us in glory as He did figuratively in the upper room. We have Him serving us still

in this way ; for amid all the wreck of ecclesiastical things this firm foundation stands.

This is John's record. There are some who seem to delight to set Paul at loggerheads with the other apostles, but he is not so seen in the scriptures, when read aright. Nor is he as to our subject. This apostle has a deal to say to the Hebrews about the Mosaic system being set aside to make way for Christ. But though the Jewish covenant is shown to decay, in the first and last chapters we are reminded that Jesus Christ never passes away. "Thou art the same" ; "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever". (Heb. i. 12 ; xiii 8). It is true that we ourselves have seen Christian conditions and institutions fade away ; but in the person of Christ we have One on Whom change can never come ; and He abides in supervision and ministry as at the beginning. In the Revelation vision of the churches, where does John see the Lord ? Still there, walking among the seven golden candlesticks.

But we have also the Spirit of God. The Lord promised to send down another Comforter, or Paraclete ; One Who should be as much to them here in this world as He Himself had been. He should come down and remain until the bride of Christ is ready and the Lord comes to meet her in the air. There is a lovely picture of this in Genesis xxiv., where Eliezer convoys Rebekah across the desert to Isaac. Is it not the blessed office of the Spirit to cheer our onward way by the ministry of Christ ? The great sin of Christendom is the practical denial of the presence of the Holy Ghost. If we realised His presence when gathered together for worship, how softly we should move, how slow to speak, how swift to hear, how much we should fear to break the silence of the Spirit or miss His utterances ! He remains with us in all the sovereign activity He had at the beginning. Why do we not see more of His activity ? Because we look amiss ; we look for some great spectacle, and forget the still small voice. Two features are ever found in the work of the Spirit.

He is here to glorify Christ, and He is the power by which we worship the Father and the Son. And one absolute mark of the ministry of the Spirit is that it glorifies Christ. But this in itself might be misleading. Hence we have a criterion in the scriptures. The Spirit of truth always works in accordance with the word. Truth is a threefold unbreakable cord—the Son could say, “ I am . . . the truth ” (John xiv. 6) ; so also, “ the Spirit is truth ” (1 John v. 6) ; and “ Thy [the Father’s] word is truth ” (John xvii. 17). If I find myself taking a certain course of action, how am I to test whether it is in accordance with the Spirit? I have the word of God as a guide. And so we can always use this test upon ourselves, only—we prefer to try it on others !

A word now on the treasure we have in the word of God as a fundamental basis on which to rest. This character of scripture is found assuring and refreshing by us only when we come to it with human theories set aside. Some come with the set notion of supporting their own fancies, and look out texts accordingly. But we need the word of God as a continual sustaining power in our own souls, and this living link by the Spirit with God Himself alone can keep our souls in communion with the Father and the Son.

If we set up a religious routine of our own, it is possible for persons to fall in with it and to trust in that routine for benefit to their own soul. A person may go to the worship-meeting looking for a word of ministry, and, if there is no word, go empty away ; and serve him right ! We must go direct to the word of God for ourselves. Why do we not ? Because we know it will proceed to set us right and to discover what is wrong with us ; and the flesh shrinks from this treatment. But this firm foundation abides, whatever our circumstances, and whatever our errors.

We must regard it as the word of the Lord, not one jot or tittle of which can fail. It is settled in heaven, and by it we are admitted into the counsels of the Most High. A great

many think the Lord may and does speak to them of their personal ways, but apparently they think He has no right to interfere with ecclesiastical matters. Some say, "I believe that where I was converted, the Lord means me to stay." We ought to be in our ecclesiastical associations only where we can, and do, obey the commandments of the Lord.

The Seal

Follow Righteousness with Thee in This

None shall, or can, overthrow the firm foundation of God. But it has a seal. A foundation is supposed to be out of sight, but a seal is visible. We have the two metaphors here. A foundation is that which is unalterably settled, and a seal is the emblem of authority, and the sign of unchangeable purpose (Dan. vi. 17). Think of this seal in connection with the One Who put it there. His seal is open to the inspection of all. There are two great truths plainly expressed in God's seal and counter-seal, which all can lay hold of, and which indeed ought to lay hold of us all: (1) "The Lord knoweth them that are His, and (2) Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness." Without discussing the connection between the seal and the foundation, does it not come home to us as a power to steady and comfort us that whoever may misunderstand our ecclesiastical associations, the Lord knows every one of us. The knowledge of the Lord is what we still have to fall back upon as a resource in the present mass of confusing and opposing forces.

Peter was particularly instructed as to the Lord's knowledge. He lent the Lord his boat from which to preach, and the Lord knew his circumstances as a fisherman, for He was not oblivious to the anxieties of a business man. "Let down your nets for a draught." "At Thy word I will—just one net." The Lord knew the whole incident comprehensively, but Peter did not know, nor dream, how much the Lord knew (Luke v. 1-11). The net enclosed a great multitude of fishes, but the net brake. The Lord said "nets," but Peter had let down one only. In John xxi. there is an echo of a sadder

scene—Peter's denial. When the Lord probed his heart to the bottom, he cried, "Thou knowest." How restorative to the soul to be brought back to this inscription upon the seal! We may be alone, and even scorned by the Christian community, but "the Lord knoweth them that are His." When all doubt us, He knows us in the totality of His omniscient love.

One other word the apostle adds as the counterpart of the seal, "Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness." This cannot mean merely unrighteousness in personal conduct, for if a man is a Christian at all he has given up unrighteousness. Are we then to set up to be judges of what is unrighteousness in others? We have both Guide and guide book with regard to the rectitude of our associations and it is incumbent on us to depart from what He condemns, remembering that God's wrath is revealed against those who "hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. i. 18).

We are each building, according to the Lord's parable (Matt. vii. 24-27). This is not by preaching, but by obedience to the word of God. The man who digs deep is the one who is doing the will of the Lord. We are rearing a building in our individual lives, and now and again we shall have a storm, and then it will be proved on what foundation we are building. If we are not building on the word of the Lord it will quiver, and shake, and collapse.

Having received any truth from the Lord, let us hold it fast for Him. He is soon coming, and He will then have something to say to us about our conduct. Whatever has not been of Him will go, and go for ever. We have not to make a way of life for ourselves, nor to build up our own associations. The way of God's good pleasure is prescribed for us in the scripture. May we keep His word for His name's sake.



CONTINUANCE IN DIVINE THINGS

AN ADDRESS ON 2 TIM. III. 14-17

“ But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them ; and that from a babe thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

“ Every scripture is inspired of God, and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction that is in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.”

There is no question that the words we have just read have a direct application to us at this present time, and that we may take them as a direct exhortation from the Holy Spirit to our souls, as well as a needed instruction with regard to the blessed character of the word of God. We know that these words were addressed especially to Timothy ; and Timothy was a man who, unlike Paul or Peter or John or James had, so far as we know, received no direct revelation of truth personally from the Lord. The apostles were men who received at firsthand from the Lord, as did the prophets also ; and both, in the power of the Spirit, communicated what they received to the church of God. But here was a person who did not himself receive from the Lord ; he received what he knew from the apostles, especially from Paul ; and, therefore, in this respect he corresponds exactly with ourselves, because what we have received of spiritual knowledge we have received from the writings of the apostles and

prophets. I am speaking particularly with regard to New Testament truths of course ; and therefore the exhortation here applied to him and the obligation laid upon him may very well be taken home to ourselves for our profit and maybe our correction.

Early Declension and Present Danger

It is for us to continue, to abide in the things that we have heard. Now we know that this Second Epistle to Timothy contemplates what was a very terrible state of things—a future state of things the beginning of which was discerned by the apostle in his day, because even then the testimony by the church to the heavenly Christ had been corrupted. The truth was there as it had been given by the Holy Ghost, but through the inattention of the saints and through their failure in responsibility, error came in and was mixed with the truth. The leaven was hidden in the meal. This mixed state of things was foreshadowed ; indeed it had already begun when the apostle wrote his First Epistle, and in the Second the general condition throughout the various assemblies had developed from bad to worse. The particular evil is not before me to point out now, nor the particular aspects of that declension and apostasy. But the peculiar difficulty then, as it seems to me, was the difficulty which we now have, a difficulty arising from the fact that wherever we go, wherever we contemplate seriously the things associated with the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we invariably find this one thing—that mixed up with the truth, intimately associated with the truth of God, there is that which is not the truth ; and we, if we realise our responsibilities to the Lord, if we realise the danger to our own souls of such a medley, must feel what a grave reproach this is bringing upon Christ's holy name.

There is no sane person who wishes to poison himself with evil doctrine ; there is no person who wants deliberately to run into spiritual danger ; there is no person who desires to corrupt his soul with that which is of the enemy and not of

God. But, beloved friends, the danger that we all must fear, either more or less, is this : that we may find ourselves in association with, or imbibing that which we in our simplicity suppose to be of God, but which all the while contains some subtle element which is of the enemy, and tends to ruin the peace and joy of our hearts, and destroy our personal communion with the Lord Jesus Christ. I suppose we have all to some degree found this to be the case from actual experience.

Delusion as to the Present Danger

It is a sad reflection that some persons are living in what we may call a fool's paradise, and cherish the delusion that everything around them is all well. No, beloved friends, it is not well. A man living entirely in the world and not professing any allegiance to Christ may cry out, "What is wrong with the world we live in?" He believes it is the very best state of things possible, and by human endeavour and enterprise, everything is gradually proceeding to a perfect felicity. A man of the world may talk like this, but we ought not to deceive ourselves; we ought to face the fact that we are in circumstances of considerable spiritual peril. We are usually thoughtful enough about our bodies; we carefully avoid injury to life or limb. As far as the body is concerned we are very careful, and take all precautions lest the physical vicissitudes of life come upon us. But is it not a fact that the soul is greater than the body? Is it not a fact that the new nature which I have by the Spirit of God, that new thing which is born of God, that this is more precious than my mortal body? Is it not that which God has begotten in me by His word and His Spirit, Who enables me to hold communion with the Highest and with Him Who is on the right hand of the Highest? And if some error creeps into my heart and robs me of that enjoyment, is it not a danger? It is a most serious danger, for while I have lost present communion, I am in a condition to lose still more of my spiritual possessions, I am sure you are all

with me in feeling that this is a danger to which we are daily and hourly exposed.

Spiritual Despair

There are, on the other hand, some persons who are imbued with such a strong sense of the extraordinary nature of the times in which we find ourselves that they think things are so hopelessly bad that it is not easy nor worth while to take any precaution whatever. They say, "Let matters take their course; let us go forward, and trust to God that everything will come out right in the end." Now, in preaching the gospel we lay down the truth very emphatically to unbelievers who talk like this. It is the unbeliever who says, "Never mind about the future; let us go on; let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." But there are believers who, if they do not use the same words, act in like manner. They say, "All the testimony is gone; the truth is overthrown; it is trodden under foot in our streets; and, therefore, all our responsibility is over, we can do as we please, we shall all get to heaven, and then things will be right."

Now, beloved friends, such a despondent spirit as this is wrong, absolutely wrong; it is a spirit of downright cowardice, to call it by no worse name. No, the truth of God is unalterable, and our responsibility with regard to it is unchanged. We are here in the world, and, as we surely know, in this holy book we have a sacred deposit. Did not God's ancient people esteem the living oracles a great deposit? Was it not to them a matter of national pride that to no other people did God speak with His own voice, and communicate His very words? And, beloved friends as representing the church of God, we have that word just as it was given at the beginning, and ought not we to love it? ought not we to reverence it? and ought not we to seek at all times to be bound and guided by it?

The Charge to Timothy

Well, now, in the words that are addressed to his son in the faith by the apostle, we have first what applied directly to Timothy (vers. 14, 15), and in the second place what was of more general concern (vers. 16, 17). In the first two of the verses, then, Timothy is particularly addressed, but, as we have seen, the words apply to ourselves also. The apostle says to him particularly, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them, and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Timothy learned from the apostles, and he had learned particularly from Paul the doctrine about the church of God, because it was in the apostles' day that these truths were made known, and the apostle Paul was the specially honoured instrument of God to make the revelation known that since Pentecost there was "one new man," no longer Jew and Gentile, but the church of God united by the Spirit of God to Christ, the living Head in heaven. This and other things the apostle had communicated to Timothy, and Timothy was exhorted to abide in the sense of their origin and nature.

Danger of Drifting

In other cases we have the exhortation for him and others to hold fast what they had. Well, to do this we require a fund of energy. There is another exhortation to hold forth the word of life (Phil. ii. 16). This again requires energy. Here we are told to *abide* in the things that we have heard; this requires energy too, but energy of a different kind. It is more of the character of what we might call passive resistance, resisting the power of evil which tends to cause us to drift away from the truth. The truth never alters, beloved friends. The truth will never drift away from us, but we may imperceptibly drift away from the truth; and this is our natural tendency. What we knew last year, what we

knew yesterday we may even now be abandoning. Insensibly we move, at first ; the first step is easy, and is so near the right path that we scarcely hesitate to take it. But having taken it we have not continued in the truth. There was the truth, we had it in our hearts, we enjoyed it, but now we are leaving it. You all know to what I allude. I am not referring to any particular thing, to any one special doctrine of the New Testament more than another ; but I am certain of this, that everyone here must have realised in his heart that those truths taught in the scriptures are unquestionably from God. You have received them from the scriptures, and they have wrought with much power in your soul. Suppose it to be, for the sake of an example, the truth of the Lord's coming again. When it first dawned upon our souls that there was a promise in the scriptures of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth, and that His personal advent was imminent, and that we were called to wait for the Son of God from heaven, did not this truth come to us with a power that laid hold of our hearts and affections and moved our whole beings ? We knew that it was a revelation of God ; we knew that it was not a cunningly-devised fable. We went forth to meet the Bridegroom. How are we today ? Is it that we have stepped aside from the powerful influence of this truth, or are we abiding in the things that we have heard ? We are called to abide in Christ ; we are called to abide in the doctrine of Christ ; indeed, we *must* abide, beloved friends, in the place and in the associations and in the enjoyment of the truths that God has made known to us.

Learning and Assurance

There is a distinction in this passage which I think we should do well to consider. The apostle says, "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of." Now "assurance" does not at all imply that we study the scriptures and that by this study we come to a mental conclusion that they are true. We must study the Bible in quite a different manner from that in which, for instance, a man studies science. A man studies science to

find out phenomena, and anyone that is at all acquainted with the history of science knows that its pathway, as we look back, is strewn with the wrecks of exploded theories which the professors have had to abandon. For the moment they fought for their hypotheses with their lives, but time has gone on, other investigators have arisen, and what was once believed to be a scientific truth has subsequently been proved to be a false hypothesis—a baseless assurance.

But, beloved friends, in our knowledge of the word of God, we have nothing of this kind. We do not come to the word of God as we come to the tentative theories of a scientific text-book. We come to the word of God as to a Book which is an infallible, immutable, and unquestionable authority for our souls. We come to it as the word of *God* ; we come to it as a Book which has a paramount demand upon our whole persons, and coming to it in this way we receive its utterances by faith ; and the possession of such a spirit, I take it, is what the “ assurance ” means. It is one thing to learn the doctrine of scripture. There are persons who learn the truth of God almost of necessity. It has been their fortunate circumstance to be in the immediate sphere where the proclamation of God’s special truth as revealed in the New Testament is continually ministered, and so the teaching insensibly finds its way into their hearts. Did I say hearts ? Let us hope so—into their minds at any rate, and they in this manner become acquainted with New Testament facts and New Testament doctrine. Many may have learned the truth in such a way, but I take it that the apostle by “ assurance ” meant much more than a mere external reception.

You must indeed first receive the truth in this way. God will not communicate anything to you or to me directly, as He did to prophets and kings of old. We cannot now expect a vision or a revelation. We have everything complete in the written word—everything that is good for us to know ; and we are left in the world to learn these things. But,

beloved friends, the question for each of us to consider is just this : in learning scripture have we been fully " assured " of it, have we laid hold of it with our whole being, has the sum of our affections been concentrated upon the Living Person Who is the centre and subject and substance of the revelation of God's holy word ?

Christ in the Scriptures

It is, in point of fact, only the personal Christ that can lay hold of our affections, and impart to us this assurance. We do not reverence and worship the Book of God as a book. We worship the Book because therein is the medium through which we know our Saviour and Lord, and coming to Him as our Lord we have in the scriptures His guide-book for us. We have the Book of His commandments, not grievous to us, but still they are His commandments ; and He therein conveys His word of authority to us in that sweet and winning tone of love which finds its way into our hearts, beloved friends, and causes us to feel thoroughly assured that we are hearing the voice of the Son of God in the scriptures.

It is thus we are " assured " of the truth of God, and in no other way. And, my beloved friends, it is of no value whatever simply to become acquainted with a set of doctrines however judiciously they may have been selected for us. We must come to the scriptures as to the fountain-head of all wisdom, and learn our lessons at the feet of Him Who can teach us as no other can. He taught Timothy, but He taught him Christianity through His apostle. The written word for the church was not given at the first ; it was then the spoken word, but still it was the word of the Lord. " I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you," as Paul said. The Corinthians, like all the early saints, had the will of the blessed Lord through the lips of the apostles ; but the apostles took care that their personality did not stand between themselves and their Master ; and thus those to whom their communications were made were under no delusion about their origin. They looked through

the apostles to the living God, Who was giving them all needful instruction through His servants.

Well, we see that there is the need of this personal assurance in the heart ; and, my beloved friends, if you will allow me to say so, I think that the spot where declension invariably begins, where the sense of tiredness with the things of God commences, is invariably in the heart. Having lost fellowship with Him, we then lose our appetite for divine things, and it becomes the more difficult to abide in the things which we have learned.

The Divine Origin of the Things

The apostle here, in exhorting Timothy to abide, gives two reasons for his continuance. “ Knowing of whom thou hast learned them,” is the first. What was the origin of this truth which he had known and was assured of ? He had received it by apostolical authority ; he received it on the word of the apostles, who had transmitted to him the word and the will of the Lord ; and therefore Timothy had a divine warrant for what he believed to be the truth, and this certainty that it was given of God was the reason why he should not depart from it. He was not told to cleave to a system on the ground that it was hoary with antiquity, that it had a splendid retrospect, and could point to miraculous evidence in the past. There was no argument of this kind, no sensual appeal in any way, but the ground was simply this—the authority of the word of the Lord. And, beloved friends, I do not think we need anything further than this today. We are in a day of extremest difficulty, and the question, “ What is truth ? ” is the question that is being generally canvassed, both in the world and in Christendom. But we need not argue about the relative merits of rival religious views. We have simply to open our ears and learn the truth by coming to the scriptures. Here we have the truth from the Lord Himself. Now, having received that word, having had it directly from the Lord Himself through His word, how can we do other than abide in it ?

Beloved friends, what shall we say in that day when we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. The Lord has His claim upon us ; we are in the world for Him. He has opened our eyes to see a little here and a little there of His revealed truth. But however little it may be it is precious—too precious to surrender ; and in view of the fact that we received it from Him what shall we say to Him in the day of account if we have allowed ourselves to slip away from it ? It is not that we run away from our duties ; it is not that we make a violent effort and simply bolt from our responsibilities. No, beloved friends, but we slide slowly away, we move just gradually along in the contrary direction ; the soporific influences of the moment creep upon our heart and cause us to leave the positions assigned to us as soldiers of Jesus Christ in the great campaign of faith ; and so we become the ensnared victims of the great enemy of our souls.

No, it remains that we have to abide in the things which we have heard and been assured of, knowing from whom we have learned them. The theories and views of men can never stand the light of the judgment-seat, but what we have from the Lord we know that He will stand to in that day. If He has told us this or that we know that He will never charge it against us that we have been holding it fast for Him. He has given to us a sacred deposit ; it is for us to produce it unsullied in the day that is to come.

The Authority of the Old Testament

But it was only a part of the whole body of truth that Timothy had received from the apostle. There was more. There was also that which he from his childhood knew to be from the Lord. Timothy had the very excellent advantage of being brought up by pious instructresses. His mother and his grandmother instructed him from the nursery in the truths of the Old Testament ; and so we have the divine authority of the Old Testament, fully maintained here by the apostle. The apostle Paul, although himself the medium of a

very great revelation, was not jealous of Old Testament claims. He placed it side by side with the New. They together compose the holy writings ; and they both were those which Timothy had known.

“ Oh, but,” you say, “ was not the New Testament quite different from the Old ? Had the churches not to abandon Judaism, and turn away from Mosaic institutions and ceremonies ? ” Most assuredly they had. They had that which was better, but that which was better was exactly in accordance with that which was of old. There was no contradiction. The Old Testament contained the essence of the New. There was one thing wanting to bring to light the hidden secrets of the Old Testament. What was it ? The Lord Jesus Christ Himself. As He said to the Pharisees, “ Ye search the scriptures ” (the Old Testament scriptures), “ for in them ye think ye have eternal life ; and they are they which testify of Me ” (John v. 30). On that memorable walk to Emmaus, when the Lord revealed Himself to the hearts of the two coming away from Jerusalem supposing that all their hopes and cherished ideas had been dashed to pieces, then He opened their eyes, opened their understanding, and unveiled to them those Old Testament scriptures which testified of Him (Luke xxiv.). As soon as they learned that the law, the prophets, and the psalms witnessed of the sufferings and the glories of the Messiah their difficulties all vanished. For He is the key to all such closed doors of scriptural interpretation.

And so Timothy, having the Old Testament scriptures and being then brought by faith to the knowledge of Christ, had nothing to surrender, nothing to unlearn. He had rather a new field of truth for his soul to explore, where he now saw that the Lord Jesus Christ was revealed in a variety of ways, His beauties being brought out by the law and the types, as well as by promises and prophecies, in those varied characters which we also have found in the Old Testament by the light of the New.

Therefore it was that Timothy had these precious things from a child, and if he did not now abide in the things which he had learned he would be giving up that too. You cannot abandon one part of scripture without the other, because the scripture is an undivided whole ; it is a complete unity. As has been said, the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old Testament lies open in the New. Put them together, and you have a perfect revelation from God. Separate them and you are in a fog, a mist ; and you cannot understand either one or the other. So Timothy was exhorted to abide equally in what was of the New Testament, and in what was of the Old.

Instructing Children in the Scriptures

There is another point in connection with this subject, beloved friends, that one cannot help noticing in passing. It is clear that these Holy Scriptures which God gave by personal communication through the Holy Ghost to the prophets of old, this peerless Book with all its sacred splendour, with its profound and illimitable wisdom, can be communicated to a child. " From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures." And I ask you whether we have not today a responsibility to the young in this respect. What was true of the Old Testament is true of both Old and New ; and if Timothy derived an incomparable advantage from the scriptural instruction he received in his most early childhood ought we not to see to it that the children of this day, our own children particularly, the children of our families, of our households, are in like manner instructed in the truths of holy scripture ?

Beloved friends, it is a grand mercy of God that such a book as the scripture of truth, which is so profound that the most agile mind is baffled by its instructions and revelations, can, as we gather here, be taught to a child, while by teaching it to a child we are conferring upon it a priceless boon. And, looking to the fact that all around us in the educational

world is a sea of confusion and error, and that in public and general schools that which is not of God is communicated, along with, if not instead of it, ought we not to be the more careful that the children who are under our particular care should be instructed in what is true and what is of God? What is of God is true, and the communication of truth is the best preservative against error.

There are some persons who say, "Let the children grow up; let them get to years of understanding; there are parts of the scriptures which I do not understand myself, and how then can I communicate them to my children?" But, beloved friends, here we have the fact that these holy women of old, Eunice and Lois, took the little babe Timothy, and they sowed in his heart the seeds of a new life, while they communicated to him those holy writings which when he was advanced to the superior knowledge of Christianity he had not to surrender, but still to maintain. They were still to be a guide to him. Therefore we ought—and it is a serious responsibility—that we should instruct our children in the truths of holy scripture, since they are able to make them "wise unto salvation."

Wise unto Salvation

One may notice, further, that the apostle does not assume that Timothy was already wise unto salvation. Why is this? Because, I think he needed, as we need, the wisdom for the moment. Wisdom is progressive: the wisdom that we had last year is not enough for today. We are continually finding ourselves in fresh predicaments, and in these predicaments we want a fresh supply that will instruct us for the occasion.

"Able to make thee wise." What does this mean? A wise man is a man who not only acts rightly. He must act rightly, of course. But the truly wise man is he that acts for God; the wise man is he who is controlled by the mind of God, having been made wise by the sacred writings. What is the wisdom of the world? It is the wisdom that in

its prospect and retrospect is bounded by this world ; it never looks beyond the confines of this present age. What did the wisdom of this world do ? It crucified the Lord of glory. They looked at Him, the despised Nazarene, as of no worth ; indeed, as a danger to the state and to their religion, and they crucified Him between two malefactors. This was the wisdom of the world. They looked at the Lord Jesus, and this was all they saw !

What is the “ hidden wisdom ” of scripture ? What is the wisdom of God ? It is the wisdom that comes from above ; it is the wisdom that enables us to look at the petty things of this life with the eyes of God, that is, as He has revealed them in His holy word. It is a great thing to be able to do this ; it is a great thing to have the heavenly light upon the earthly path, and, beloved friends, herein is the special value to us of the scriptures. Why do we often make mistakes ? I think, if we were honest and sincere with ourselves, we should confess that invariably each mistake which we have made in the past was made because we did not carry out the simple instructions of scripture. We go wrong because we act according to the light of our own eyes. Beloved friends, there is nothing in a man’s life—you know this as well as I do, but allow me to remind you of it—there is no slight circumstance in our daily lives, whether in the home or in business—there is nothing, good or bad, great or small, but we may have the light of God’s truth upon it.

The holy scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, and that salvation, I take it, means more than the salvation of our souls. Do not let us narrow down the large words of scripture, nor take these grand and comprehensive terms, and just whittle them down to some little miserable definition to which we are pleased to reduce them. No, beloved friends, we want to have the exact words of God as given to us, and as we meditate upon them and consider them in the Genesis to Revelation light we shall find that we comprehend in them things that we have never dreamt of before. The

fact is that we need salvation every day ; we need salvation from the tendencies to stray which we find in ourselves, and from the difficulties into which we thrust ourselves, often through our own folly. What dishonour we sometimes bring to the name of the Lord Jesus through our wanton foolishness, because we did not think soon enough, because the suitable text of scripture did not come home to our souls, nay, because we acted before it came home ; we were in too great a hurry, and did not wait. Beloved friends, do not let us be in a hurry ; hurry is not of God ; hurry is of the world. When we leave the turmoil of the streets and find ourselves in the peace of the sanctuary, how all there is calm and quiet ; not a footfall there in the presence of God ; all is holy hush ; all about us are signs of the greatness and majesty of Him in Whose presence we are. No, beloved friends, there is no haste there ; and “ he that believeth shall not make haste.”

Faith in Christ Jesus needed

The scriptures are able to make us “ wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Now I think “ Christ Jesus ” is the key to all our difficulties. There are many persons who burden themselves with immense trouble because of the difficulties they find in the scriptures. They have a long catalogue of them, and they are always dwelling upon these unsolved problems. When you meet them for godly intercourse they confront you with such a long list of questions upon this, that, and the other, that you feel you want a big encyclopædia to consult, and that even then you would not find the answer to their posers. They ask you, and you say you do not know ; and they ask somebody else, and they do not know ; and so they spend their time feeding upon these unsatisfying husks. No, beloved, friends, there are always difficulties in scripture, and there always will be. A man who has not found any such in the scripture is a poor specimen of a Christian indeed. Of course my difficulties arise because I am reading the word of God, and because of my little mind, my little heart. Oh, my beloved friends, you cannot put the ocean into a teacup—and the infinite word of

God is altogether beyond me and my feeble comprehension. There will, therefore, always be difficulties. But there is a golden key which unlocks a great many of the believer's more practical difficulties, and this key is Christ Jesus—as it is put here, “faith in Christ Jesus.” It is not, of course, the personal faith for salvation, but the faith that sees Christ Jesus, and the honour and glory of Christ Jesus in connection with the affairs of this life. Why am I here in M——? Why am I doing this, that, or the other, if it is not that faith in Christ Jesus is the prompting motive?

Depend upon it, there is never any wisdom in our conduct, and we are not wise even in being here tonight, without that faith in Christ Jesus which will also enable us to solve the manifold difficulties of this life. I do not say of scripture, but of this life—that is, difficulties in deciding what we should be and what we should do for God. There are always new vistas opening before us, and they look, oh, so pleasant from a distance; and the question arises, are we to go there? There are so many allurements; sometimes there is even the name of Christ outwardly connected with it; there is a great field of service connected with it; there are many holy privileges and associations connected with it; it all looks, oh, so pleasant and inviting. Is it that the distance lends enchantment to the view? What may I do? What will give me divine light on the way and remove my difficulty when there are so many voices calling me in every direction, and many using the name of the Lord? What am I to do? There must be personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself for the guidance of His word. Did He not say to His own, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life?”

Guidance in the Assembly

There was one question of this nature asked here this afternoon. It was how a person might know in the assembly whether he was directed by the Spirit of God to take an audible part. I think that this principle we are considering solves the problem: the answer is “faith in Christ Jesus.”

When we are together in assembly the Lord Jesus Christ is there ; He is Lord, He is Lord of all, and how much more is he our Lord when in our midst ! Beloved friends, He is the Lord of the blasphemer ; is He not then Lord of the believer ? The day is coming when the scoffer shall bow to Him ; ought we not to bow to Him now ? and if I am in the assembly and I know the Lord is there, this very fact, which can only be realised by faith in Christ Jesus, this very fact will bring me to my proper place of subjection and cause me to assume that right and reverent attitude in His presence which becomes both brother and sister.

There are a great many brothers and sisters who think that in an assembly meeting it is only the brothers who have to be led by the Spirit. This is quite a mistake. Brothers have to be led by the Spirit to open their mouths, but the whole assembly must be led by the Spirit to open their hearts to the Lord, and the Spirit is there to produce in the hearts of those assembled all that which is suitable to the occasion.

There is one infallible guide whereby we may know that which is of the Spirit. If the " Spirit is truth " (1 John v. 6), and if " Thy word is truth " (John xvii. 17), there can be no contradiction between them ; so that what is of the scripture is of the Spirit, and what is done to the glory of the Lord Who is in the midst is of the Spirit also ; while Christ Jesus Himself is the Truth (John xiv. 6). And reverent regard to His invisible presence is an indispensable element of that worship in spirit and truth which the Father seeks in His worshippers.

The Inspiration of Every Scripture

We now come to what is a more general truth, yet one of vital importance (vers. 16, 17), but our time is almost gone, and I can only refer to it briefly. But do not let us forget the previous exhortation ; here we have what is true of the scriptures as a whole and equally so of its parts. The apostle had already mentioned the holy writings which were of Old

Testament times. Now he comes to that which is general, because at that time some of the New Testament scriptures had not been written. Some apostolic truths had not then been communicated in the way of writing, and therefore these were not yet "scripture." Hence the Spirit of God caused the apostle to write in terms which should be of the greatest assurance and comfort to us in these days of Biblical criticism.

"Every scripture," he says, "is inspired of God." Now we know that it is a common article of the creed of Christendom—at any rate it was so once—that the scriptures are inspired of God. But, beloved friends, we must not think only of the general fact that scripture is given of God in a providential manner, like rain and sunshine. We need to have the central truth about it in our hearts, and this truth is that in the scriptures we may be absolutely certain that we have the voice of God to our souls. There are many persons who have tortured their minds and the minds of other people to provide an adequate definition of what inspiration is—where it begins, where it ends, what it really involves, and so on. Beloved friends, we can afford to leave all these inquiries and confine ourselves to the single fact that when we open our Bibles and read our Bibles, there we have that which is of God. God has infused into its words that which is of Himself, and which gives them a character which nothing else has.

We may see an illustration of this divine character in the formation of Adam. God formed the body of the first man out of the ground, and there was a shapely form—not of some hairy uncouth savage, as many persons think nowadays—but of a handsome man, a man that God had designed to occupy a place of sovereignty in His world below. But there it was, a lifeless, inert mass, beautiful to look at, but a thing without life ; no motion, no sound, just simply a part of this lower world—dust, a grand and beautiful body of dust only. Now God communicated from Himself to that inanimate mass ; "He breathed into his nostrils the

breath of life, and man became a living soul." Thus were the soul and spirit communicated by the direct inspiration of the Almighty, and thus man was placed at a tremendous distance from the rest of the living world. The beasts that perish have their soul and spirit ; they return to the dust from which they have sprung. Man received his originally from on high. This emanation from God constitutes the difference between man and lower creation.

And it is even so with this holy Book. People will tell you that the works of Shakespeare, as well as the older writings of Greek and Latin poets and philosophers, have their measure of inspiration, and so they put some parts of the Bible a little way above such books, but only just a little way. By and by they bring the whole volume to the same level, and presently it goes into the waste-paper basket—no use at all as an infallible message from God to man.

The great truth, however, is that in every scripture we have something which is different in kind and nature from every other book on the face of the earth ; and the essence of the difference lies in this : it is inspired of God ; and though I may be the simplest person on the earth I can come to it and get divine direction. I may be only a little child just able to prattle, but I can be instructed in my measure in the truths of scripture. That blessed and holy Visitant from heaven above, the Lord Jesus Christ, when He was here, was pleased to take the babes in His arms and bless them, and the heavenly light and radiance in Him did not distress or awe the infantile minds, but gave them a sweet content.

Oh, beloved friends, it is a great mercy of God that we in this day of great theological errors have our Bibles, that we have scripture which is inspired of God, and nothing can wrest it from us. We possess it ; but the crucial point is whether we make that use of it which we ought to make. It is profitable—profitable in a fourfold way—but as declared here, particularly to Timothy, it is so especially

“ that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

The Man of God

Now, you notice this term, “ man of God,” which occurs here, and also in the First Epistle. I think it is a word to retain in our minds as a subject for prayerful meditation, while we consider its special significance in the connexion in which it is used. We find the term in the Old Testament also. We see that at a particular period it was applied to the prophets of Israel. It was used at the time of the people’s declension, their national declension from the worship of Jehovah, and when the chosen seed of Abraham had been carried away into the baseness of idolatry, and the whole ten tribes especially were involved. The prophet of God is then called the man of God. Why? Because he was the man who stood for God in the midst of the mass of his fellow-men who were characterised by error. The man of God stood for God, and, if necessary, stood alone.

There is, according to prophecy, a man coming who has an evil title, “ the man of sin ” (2 Thess. ii. 3), who shall sum up in himself impiety in all its worst forms. He is the man that will stand for sin. But we are called today, every one of us, like the prophets of old, and like Timothy, to stand for God. Oh, beloved friends, it is surely a privilege to be on God’s side, and to know that we are in the current of God’s thoughts in a day of general departure and declension. We can see error all around. Some persons say, “ You should not talk about these things ; they do not create any pleasant feelings in our minds.” Of course they do not, they are not intended to awaken a pleasant feeling ; they are intended to arouse in us the very reverse—a revulsion of feeling so that we should never be ensnared by the evil tendencies.

There are those who are entrapped. You do not want to be entrapped, do you ? Be, on the contrary, a man of God.

Do you ask how you can be a man of God? Only by cleaving simply to the scripture. Do not attempt loyalty to God in any other way. There are persons who look round upon the divisions of Christendom and throw up their hands in horror in view of the number of the sects. Some persons they know have been the evil instruments of making more sects. Cannot we reduce them? they say. If there are, say five hundred, can we not make four hundred and ninety-nine by bringing two sects together, or even reduce the total to four hundred and ninety-eight? Beloved friends, even in such a case not very much good would be done after all. No, we are not called to do this. It is not for you—if I may still keep to the figure five hundred—it is not for you to select (say) number four hundred and number four hundred and five, and join these two together and let the others go their separate ways. If you wish to do the work of re-union you must aim to bring all the five hundred together. This you will never do; it is too late in the church's day to attempt it.

How to Consult the Bible

What we have to do is to be men of God, and the only way in which we can be perfectly instructed to become such in these perilous times is by having the word of God before us, and by coming to it as an inspired communication to our souls. Depend upon it, the reason why we do not profit by the word of God as we might is that we do not approach it in a practical way. By a practical way I mean coming to it for light upon particular points of conduct or of service or of association. There are persons who, having a difficulty, say, "I will lay it before so-and-so, he may help me." They write, or wait till the brother comes, who sends it to another, and so the question goes round, and when it returns eventually the question is exactly where it was before—so is the questioner. We should, of course, seek to help one another. I am not saying a word against that practice, but, beloved friends, you will never get useful help from other persons unless you yourselves go directly to the word of God, and

honour the Spirit of God Who has been given expressly to guide you into all truth.

It is an absolute necessity in these days to have direct recourse to the word of God. It may be on a personal matter, or it may be upon a church matter, and we ought always to remember the distinction between the two things. We have a personal relation as children of God, and the scripture gives us light for its due discharge. But in the face of the terrible confusion and the wreck and havoc that have been wrought in the outward testimony of the church of God, we still remain individual members of the one body of which Christ is the Head. Now, as members of that body, have we not also a particular responsibility in our corporate relationships? Is there anything that the Lord, to Whom we are attached by this loving tie, is there anything that He would have us try to do for Him while we wait for His coming? I know of no other means of obtaining the answer to such a question save by reference to Holy Scripture. There you have that which is inspired of God, which will teach you all that is good for you to know, and which will instruct you in all good works. May God bless His word to this end unto us all.

W.J.H.

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