



CONTINUANCE IN
DIVINE THINGS

(2 TIM. III. 14-17)

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED IN MIDDLESBRO'
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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 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, throughly 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 of the 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, no direct revelation himself 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, 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, the obligation that is laid upon him, may very well be taken home to ourselves.

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 state of things 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, but through the inattention of the saints, through their failure in responsibility, error came in and was mixed with the truth. This mixed state of things was foreshadowed; indeed it had already begun when the apostle wrote his First Epistle, and in the Second things had developed from bad to worse. The particular evil is not before me to point out now, nor the par-

ticular 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 difficulty this is.

There is no sane person who wishes to poison himself; there is no person who wants deliberately to run into danger; there is no person who desires to corrupt his soul with that which is not of God. But, beloved friends, the danger that we all must feel, 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, and all the while there is that connected with it which is of the enemy, and which tends to ruin the peace and joy of our hearts, and to destroy our personal communion with the Lord Jesus Christ. I suppose we have all to some degree found this.

DELUSION AS TO THE PRESENT DANGER

It is a sad thing that there are persons who are living in what we may call a fool's paradise, and who go on supposing that everything around us is all well. No, beloved friends, it is not well

A man directly 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 everything is 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 danger. We are usually thoughtful enough about our bodies; we would not risk injury to life or limb. As far as the body is concerned we are very careful, and take all precautions that such a thing as physical vicissitude shall not be. 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 body? Is it not that which God has begotten in me by His word and Spirit, and which 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 danger, for while I have lost present communion, I am in a condition to lose still more; and 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 some persons who are imbued with such a 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 to take any precaution, whatever. They say, "Let things take their course; let us go forward, and trust to God that all things 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 to-morrow we die." But there are believers who, if they do not say the same thing, act in this 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 spirit as this is wrong, absolutely wrong; it is a spirit of downright cowardice, to call it by no worse name. No, the truth 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 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 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 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 Timothy is particularly addressed, but, as we have seen, the words apply to ourselves. 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 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 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 an 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.

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 drift away from the truth, and this is our danger. What we knew last year, what we knew yesterday we may even now be departing from. Insensibly we move, at first; the first step is easy and 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 have left it. You all know to what I allude. I am not referring to any particular thing, 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 many things taught in the Scriptures are unquestionably from God. You have had them from the Scriptures, and they have wrought with much power in your souls. 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 here 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 with a power that

laid hold of our hearts and affections and moved our whole beings? We knew that it was of God; we knew that it was not a cunningly-devised fable. How are we to-day? Is it that we have stepped aside from the power 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 here 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 this phrase does not at all imply that we study the Scriptures and that it is thus we come to a mental conclusion that they are true. We must study the Bible in quite a different manner from that in which 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 men 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 believed to be the truth has subsequently been proved to be a false hypothesis.

But, beloved friends, in 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 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 it by faith; and 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 thing 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 the apostle meant much more than this by "assurance."

You must indeed first receive the truth in this way. God will not communicate anything to you or to me directly. We cannot 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 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 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. We do not reverence and worship the Book 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, 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 was not given, 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 at all. They looked through the apostles to the living God, who was giving all things 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. 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 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 to-day. 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 to argue about the matter. We have simply to open our ears and learn, 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, we move just gradually along in the contrary direc-

tion; the soporific influences of the moment creep upon our hearts and cause us to leave the positions assigned us as soldiers of Jesus Christ in the great campaign; 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 us with holding it for Him. He has given it to us; 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 knew from the Lord from a babe. 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 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 are the holy writings, and they were those which Timothy had known.

“ Oh, but,” you say, “ was not the New Testament quite different from the Old? Had they 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 with all their hopes and cherished ideas dashed to pieces, then He opened their eyes, opened their understandings, 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 glories of the Messiah their difficulties all vanished. For He is the key to all such closed doors.

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 revel in where he now saw that the Lord Jesus Christ was revealed in a

variety of ways, His beauties being brought out by the law, by the types, as well as by promises and prophecies, in those varied characters which we also have found in the Old Testament.

Therefore it was that he had these precious things from a child, and if he did not 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. And Timothy was to abide equally in what was of the New Testament, and in what was of the Old.

INSTRUCTING CHILDREN IN THE SCRIPTURES

There is just another point in connection with this subject, beloved friends, that one cannot help noticing in passing, and it is that these Holy Scriptures which God gave by personal communication through the Holy Ghost to the prophets of old, that Book with all its holy splendour, with its profound and illimitable wisdom, could be communicated to a child. "From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures," and I now ask you whether we have not to-day a responsibility 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 instruction he received in his most early childhood—instruction in the Scriptures—ought we not to see to it that the children of this day, our 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, 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 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 the seeds of 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 our 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; the wisdom that we had last year is not enough for to-day. We are continually finding ourselves in fresh predicaments, and in these predicaments we want something 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. It must be that he acts rightly, of course. But the wise man is he that acts for God; the wise man is he who is controlled by the mind of God. 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. This was the wisdom of the world. They looked at the Lord Jesus, and this was all they saw!

What is the "hidden wisdom"? 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 revealed 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 value of the Scriptures. Why do we 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 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 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 we shall find that we comprehend in them things that we have never

dreamt of before. We need salvation every day; we need salvation from the tendencies in which we find ourselves, and 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 difficulties. When you meet them 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 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 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 Scriptures is a poor specimen of a Christian indeed. Of course my difficulties arise because this is the word of God, and because of my little mind, my little heart—oh, my beloved friends, you cannot put the ocean in a teacup—and the word of God is altogether beyond me and my feeble comprehension, and there will therefore always be difficulties. But there is a golden key which unlocks a great many of the 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 things 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 wisdom in our conduct, and we are not wise in being here to-night, without that faith in Christ Jesus which will enable us to solve the difficulties of this life. I do not say of scripture, but of this life—that is, difficulties as to where 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; 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 things and associations connected with it; it all looks, oh, so pleasant and inviting. Is it that distance lends enchantment to the view? What may I do? What is it that will give me light on the way in 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 for the guidance of His word.

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 have here solves the difficulty: it 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 when in our midst. Beloved friends, He is the Lord of the blasphemer; is He not then our Lord? 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 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; and Jesus Himself is the Truth (John xiv. 6).

THE INSPIRATION OF EVERY SCRIPTURE

We now come to that which is general (vers. 16, 17), but our time is 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 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 there were some of the New Testament

scriptures which had not yet been written. They had not then been communicated in the way of writings, and therefore these were not yet "scripture." Hence the Spirit of God caused the apostle to write that which should be of the greatest comfort to us in these days.

"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. We need to have the truth about it in our hearts, and the truth about it 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 as to 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 it that which is of Himself, and which gives it a character which nothing else has.

We may see an illustration of it 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 dead, 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, but 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 world. The beasts that perish have their soul and spirit; they return to the dust from which they sprung. Man received his originally from on high. This constitutes the difference between man and the 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 the Bible a little way above such books, but only just a little way. By and by they bring it to the same level, and presently it goes into the waste-paper basket—no use at all.

The great truth is that we have something here 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.

Oh, beloved friends, it is a great mercy of God that we in this day of great errors have our Bibles, that we have that which is inspired of God, and nothing can wrest it from us. We have 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, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

THE MAN OF GOD

Now, you notice that this term “man of God” occurs here, and also in the First Epistle. I think it is a word we might retain in our minds as a term to meditate upon, and to consider what is its special significance in the connexion in which it is used. We find the term also in the Old Testament. We see that at a particular period it was applied to the prophets of Israel. It was used at the time of their declension, their national declension from the worship of Jehovah, and when they had been carried away into the baseness of idolatry, and the whole ten tribes were involved. The prophet of God is called the man of God. Why?

Because he was the man who stood for God in the midst of the mass which is characterised by error. He 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," 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 to-day, every one of us, like the prophet, and like Timothy, to stand for God. Oh, beloved friends, it is a privilege surely 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 it in any other way. There are persons who look round upon the divisions of Christendom and they throw up their hands in horror in view of the number of the sects. Some persons we know have been the evil instruments of making more sects. Cannot we reduce them? If there are, say, five hundred, can we not make four hundred and ninety-nine by bringing

two sects together, or even reduce them to four hundred and ninety-eight? Beloved friends, even in such a case we should not do very much good 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 way. 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 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 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 come to it in a practical way. By a practical way I mean coming to it for light upon particular points of conduct or service or 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 on to another, and so the question goes round, and when it returns eventually, the question is exactly where it was before. We should, of course, seek to help one another. I am not saying a word against that, but, beloved friends, you

will never get useful help from other persons unless you go directly yourselves to the word of God.

It is an absolute necessity in these days to have direct recourse to the word of God. It may be upon a personal matter, or it may be upon a church matter, and we ought to remember the distinction between the two things. We have a personal relation as children of God, and the Scripture gives us light for that. 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 members of the one body of which Christ is the Head. Now, as members of that body, have we not a particular responsibility? 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.

W. J. H.



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