

# Gift, and Local Office.

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*1 Tim. 3.*

## **"Handfuls of Purpose" Part 3 (Miscellaneous, chapters 15 - 30).**

*Let fall for eager Gleaners.*

*Thirty Addresses on Various Scripture Truths and Incidents*

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### **CHAPTER 27 — GIFT, AND LOCAL OFFICE.**

Many saints have not a due and right sense of what ministry springs from, and so, in their minds, the exercise of spiritual gifts has been confounded with local offices. Now, an elder, or a deacon, might be a gifted man or not. Ministry is the exercise of a spiritual gift which flows from the Lord in glory, and belongs to the Church at large; while these appointments were purely local, and are only seen in certain Assemblies, where the apostle Paul or his delegates had ordained them.

In some of the epistles the Assemblies are not addressed as having these local officers, while in that to the Philippians they are mentioned, and their qualifications are given in the first epistle to Timothy, as well as in that to Titus.

The word "elder," as all know, means those who are not young, but advanced in years. The word is used about sixty times in the New Testament, but only a few of these apply to the Church of God, and we will look at these. A bishop had to be an elder, but not every elder was a bishop. The translators of our admirable English Bible, who were used to episcopacy, whenever they came to a word which might be translated bishop, so translated it, as in Titus 1: 7. What Paul learns is this, that there has come into this scene One who, Himself God, has become a man, that He might travel over the pathway of man in this world, and one loves to think there is no possible position that a saint could be in that we do not find the Lord taking up. I see two things in the history of that blessed Man. 1. The beautiful and perfect revelation of what God is. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1: 18). If I would know God I must gaze upon the Person of Jesus. 2. We have the perfect exhibition of the pathway of man, as he should be for God; not only that He comes to make known God to us, but to take up all the responsibilities of man; and once and again He is met by a voice that says, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." At His baptism the heavens are opened for the first time, and the Father's voice is heard saying, "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3: 22). He does not say at the baptism, "Hear him;" that goes without saying, as if every one would be sure to hear Him. Then

again, on the mount of transfiguration, the end of the pathway is drawing nigh, and there Peter suggests the thought of making three tabernacles — "One for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias" (Luke 9: 33). But the Father could not brook such an indignity as bringing Him on the level with the law-giver and the reformer. Their day had gone by, hence the word is, "This is my beloved Son: *hear HIM*" (ver. 35).

Though He might have gone up to glory from that mount, and none would have challenged His right, He turns, and comes down, and goes down into death, because if He had not died the corn of wheat must have abode alone. But on the cross He took up the whole question of man's sin, and guilt, and state before God.

Not only did He bear our sins, but He was made sin. He bridged the entire distance between God and man. He closed up in His own death on the cross — where in grace He died vicariously — the history of man in the flesh, so that when Jesus was dead on the cross, one universal scene of death was the only thing before the eye of God; every other man was dead in sins, and Christ was then dead *for* sin. But what follows? Resurrection! The annuler of death rises from the grave, and meets Mary at its door. Her heart was full of affection for the Lord. She goes to His tomb, and is detained there. She was a woman who had now no home here, because He was absent, and therefore she remained weeping. He rises from the dead to meet the heart that was broken, and bleeding, in sympathy with, and love for Him. I wish we had half the affection which that woman had. She had seen angels, but turned her back on them. Which of us would not have been detained by angels? Then she turns her back on man — the gardener, as she supposed; but she hears a voice, and turns round and sees Jesus Himself, and He reveals the truth. A most blessed revelation indeed was it, viz., that He was going to a new place. He said, "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father." Mary, I doubt not, felt thus: "Lord, I lost you, but now I have got you. Am I to lose you again?" How sweetly He calms such a thought in her heart as He goes on, and gives Mary her eternally unequalled commission, "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God, and your God" (John 20: 17).

There is a man gone up into the glory on the ground of divine righteousness. Man in Christ has gone into glory. The first man went into death as the end of a pathway of self-will, disobedience, and sin, and God let him stay there; and now there has come in this second man, this last Adam, who only reached death as the end of a pathway of subjection, will-lessness, and obedience, and God takes Him out of death and gives Him glory; but He does not go up to that glory until He has stopped by the way, to tell this loving woman, and commission her to tell others, that His Father was their Father, and His God their God. He links and associates us with Himself in the place where He is gone — that is what I understand to be "a man in Christ." He brought Godhead to earth, and now He has taken humanity into heaven, and there you have a home. The Lord goes up, and the Holy Ghost comes down. Stephen sees Jesus in the glory. The devil cannot bear that, so he batters his head with stones, and silences Christ's witness in death, in reality doing Stephen a favour, by sending him more quickly to be with His Saviour, for Satan ever defeats himself. Saul of Tarsus was standing by, and Christ takes up this man who had heard Stephen's testimony to Himself as man in glory, and, converting him, in the midst of his murderous work, makes him the "chosen vessel" and channel of conveying these glorious tidings to the Gentiles.

Stephen, who had seen Jesus in glory, dies in the likeness of His master; and then the Lord, as it were, says, "I will pick up that man who has heard I am alive in glory, let him see Me where I am, and then I will enable that man to live, and testify for Me on earth where *I am not*."

2 Corinthians 12 coincides, apparently, with the time chronologically when Paul came to Lystra (*see* Acts 14: 6-20). God gave him this marvellous revelation — "Caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Cor. 12: 4) — so far as we can judge just at a moment when, for Christ's sake, his life was despaired of by others on earth — for the rabble "having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead" (Acts 14: 19). It was the fitting moment to let a man, who had apparently done with earth, see what heaven was like. Thus in the wonderful wisdom of God He lets this blessed man, in this particular part of his earthly pathway, see and hear Jesus there; and then he comes back to earth, to the scene whence Christ was cast out, and there he freshly learns the sufficiency of the grace of Christ.

Everything that we possess is up there. All the springs and resources of the soul are in heaven. When Paul came down, what a dingy, murky scene must this world have seemed to him, after the unsullied glories of the scene he had been caught up to! What difficulties he came back to all the dull duties of life!

Paul has this wonderful revelation, and then he gets the "thorn in the flesh; and just as he received the "thorn in the flesh" — so the Lord sees good to let us have one — and we cannot get on without the grace of Christ. "My grace is sufficient for thee" is a lovely word for our souls at all times.

If you have a very difficult pathway, is not the grace of Christ enough? the arm of Christ enough? Ah! yes. The more we learn that He is our life, and we are just set here, and to be here for Him, the more deeply we feel we cannot get on a single inch without Him. We then hear Him say, "My grace is sufficient for thee." The Lord does not usually take away the difficulty, but gives strength to go through it. Paul is an illustration in his own pathway of this truth.

Christianity is the reproduction of the life of Christ in the life of the Christian. As "a man in Christ" I see the place grace gives me in glory, and am to taste the grace that flows from that glory for every exigency of the pathway here.

Now let us briefly look at the "man of God" in 1 Timothy 6. The same man writes to Timothy — a fellow-servant young in years. He had a great desire for him, and he writes exceedingly plainly on the subject of godliness. Some suppose "that gain is godliness." The injunction is: "From such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain." Gain is not godliness, "but godliness with contentment is great gain." This is an immense thing, but how is it to be attained? Lot wanted a little bit more than he had. He had not then this godliness. He was tested and failed. I believe the same test comes often across our path. If I am determined to get on in the world, God may let me, and then I shall find the word true, "He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul." "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" is a good word to remember.

People say sometimes, "He died worth so and so." This is a great mistake. A man never dies worth what he leaves behind, but what he has sent on before.

Do you want to be rich? You will fall into a pit. This is the point. "They that WILL [they want to] be rich fall into temptation and a snare." It is not that there is any harm in money, but in the love of it.

I believe it is often proved to be with us, as you get it stated of Israel in Haggai's day. They were dwelling in ceiled houses, and the house of God lying waste. Self was uppermost, but God was watchful of His people. His hand was on them, hence we read, "He that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." How did the holes get there? I believe the Lord cut them.

Having warned Timothy thus, the apostle now exhorts and addresses him by a most lovely title. "But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life." He, as it were, says, You are here where man has cast God's Man out, and here you are to be in the place of Christ. It is a wonderful favour to be God's man in a dark world. The Shunammite could say, regarding Elisha, "I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually" (2 Kings 4: 9).

What a nice thing that others can perceive the features of the man of God. In 2 Timothy 3 Paul points the way to you and me to be such. He says here, however, "*Flee* these things," which he has named; and then adds, "Follow *these* things;" viz., "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness."

"Lay hold of eternal life" is a remarkable word. You say, "I think I have got it" Are you quite sure of that? It is evidently something that he had to reach out and grasp; for was he not told to lay hold of it? It is what belongs to the man in Christ, but he is to lay hold of what really belongs to him, therefore he adds, "Fight the good fight of faith."

In one aspect eternal life is ours now, as being the gift of God received by faith; in another, it is a future thing — "the end everlasting life." That is the goal — the end of the Christian's pathway.

Now turn to the next epistle. What Paul presses here is open to every saint of God. "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. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3: 14-17).

Scripture is that which our souls are turned back upon, and which really fits the man of God — whoever he may be — for his work. Then in chapter 4: 5 we read: "Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am

now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." Do the work of the evangelist. People ask me, "Are you an evangelist?" "I don't know," I reply. I do not know or care whether I am one or not, if I can only do the work of one. The work of the evangelist is to bring Christ before souls, and bring souls to Christ. In the day when everything is out of gear, the servant of Christ is to be "man of all work." When an establishment is in full working order there may be the tablemaid, the housemaid, and the cook, but when things are diminished, and retrenchment is the order of the day, then there comes as a necessity the "maid of all work"; and so the servant of Christ may have to do a little bit of gospel work, a little bit of teaching, a little bit of pastoral work. Any service for Christ is sweet.

How beautiful to find this dear old servant of Christ now saying, "I have fought a good fight;" a lovely close to a grand history. He has spoken in these two epistles about some *making shipwreck* of faith (1 Tim. 1: 19); some "*departing from the faith*" (1 Tim. 4: 1); some "*denying the faith*" (1 Tim. 5: 8); some "being *seduced* from the faith" (1 Tim. 6: 10); some "*erring* concerning the faith" (1 Tim. 6: 21); others "*overthrowing* the faith of some" (2 Tim. 2: 18); others were "*reprobate* concerning the faith" (2 Tim. 3: 18). But the truth that God had given him he had kept, hence he could say triumphantly, "*I have kept the faith*" (2 Tim. 4: 7). The devil wants us, dear friends, to give up that which God has given us. These epistles show us the value of holding it fast. What joy it is to be a Christian, a possessor of eternal life, passing through this scene of trials, but linked with heaven before we get there. It is very sweet to hear Paul now add, "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

Faint not then, fellow-believers, fellow-soldiers, for you will get a crown also, for it is for "all that love his appearing." The Lord keep us in His infinite grace, knowing that we are men in Christ, and seeking to be truly men of God, going on simply, quietly, fervently, till we see His blessed face; and what an answer to all the exercises of the way will it be, when we see Him and are like Him, and with Him, for ever in glory.

When wandering far from the Father's abode,  
The heart full of pride and hatred to God,  
The children of darkness, of Satan the slaves,  
'Twas Jesus redeemed us — His merit that saves.  
Our sins on the cross He on Calvary bore,  
He blotted them out, and they are no more  
Now pardoned and washed, we boldly draw near,

And cry "Abba, Father!" unhindered by fear.  
Despised by the world, we're strangers below,  
But callèd to heaven we cheerfully go;  
The Lord is our leader, and, strong in His might,  
Though Satan opposes we fight the good fight.  
We look for the day when Jesus shall come  
And take all His blood-purchased brethren home  
When we shall behold all His glory and grace,  
And a heaven be found in the light of His face!