

The First Epistle to Timothy

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Quotations from Scripture are from the Authorised Version or from the New Translation of J.N.D.

1 Introduction

The perusal of Scripture clearly shows that many of the Epistles of the apostle Paul are mainly

corrective, being written to meet grave disorders and erroneous teaching that troubled the early assemblies. There are, however, Epistles, as for instance the Epistle to the Ephesians and the First Epistle to Timothy, which are mainly instructive, inasmuch as they present the church in its divine order according to the mind of God.

Each of these Epistles presents a special aspect of the church. In the Epistle to the Ephesians the church is viewed as composed of believers united together by the Holy Spirit to form the mystical body of which Christ in heaven is the Head, thus presenting the church in its heavenly relationships according to the counsels of God.

In the First Epistle to Timothy, the church is viewed as composed of believers “builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2: 22). In connection with this great truth, the instruction of the Epistle has in view a twofold end. Firstly, the apostle writes to charge believers to live the practical life of piety consistent with the house of God, as we read, “that thou mayest know how one ought to conduct oneself in God’s house, which is the assembly of the living God” (1 Timothy 3: 15). Secondly, the apostle writes to instruct us that the great purpose of the house of God is to be a witness in the world that God is a Saviour God, “who will have all men to be saved.”

God’s desire is that, by the church, there should be in the world a collective testimony to Himself in all His holiness and grace as a Saviour God. To present this testimony we must know the order of God’s house and the behaviour suited to His house.

The Epistle thus presents the purpose and order of God’s house according to the mind of God. It shows that this godly order is not only to govern the assembly, but to have an effect on every detail of the lives of those who compose the house of God, whether men or women, old or young, married or unmarried, servants or masters, rich or poor.

In the ruined condition of Christendom the truth of the Epistle is largely obscured, or ignored, either by “individualism” or “sectarianism”. Many earnest souls, seeing little beyond their individual salvation, are indifferent to the fact that, being saved, believers form the house of God with all its privileges and responsibilities. Others, feeling the necessity of Christian fellowship, but failing to see what God has established, have set to work to form religious systems according to their own ideas of order.

Thus, in different ways, the great truth that God has formed His house composed of believers “builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” is ignored. The truth would lead us, not to view ourselves merely as saved individuals, nor to endeavour to gather Christians together into systems invented by men, but to recognise our part in the house that God has already formed, and act in the light of it, while refusing all that is a denial of that house in principle and practice.

Desiring to walk in simple obedience to the word of God, we shall appreciate the mercy that has preserved to us, in this Epistle, the mind of God for His church viewed as the house of God. It is only as we have before us God’s standard that we can intelligently seek to answer to His mind. We must know the truth to act upon it; and only as we are grounded in the truth shall we be able to detect and refuse error.

Presenting the behaviour consistent with God’s house, it follows that practice, rather than doctrine, passes before us in the Epistle.

In 1 Timothy 1 the gospel of the grace of God is presented as the great testimony that is to flow out to the world from the house of God.

In 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Timothy 3 we are instructed as to the practical order that becomes God's house, so that all who compose the house, both men and women, may live in consistency with the dwelling-place of God, and that nothing is to be allowed to mar the testimony that flows from the house.

In 1 Timothy 4 to 1 Timothy 6 we are warned against the different forms in which the flesh manifests itself, and we are instructed in “piety”, or “godliness”, as the great safeguard against every evil principle contrary to the order of God's house.

2 The Charge and its End

(1 Timothy 1)

The Epistle opens with the insistence of the doctrines of grace (v. 3), as well as a right spiritual condition (v. 5), in order that the people of God may be a witness to God as the Saviour.

(a) The Greeting (*verses 1, 2*)

(V. 1). Having in view the house of God as a witness to the Saviour God, the apostle presents himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God *our Saviour*, and Christ Jesus, *our hope*. Thus he presents God as the Saviour of the world and Christ as the only hope of the soul. Apart from Christ we are without hope (Eph. 2: 12; Rom. 15: 12).

(V. 2). Turning to Timothy, as his own child in the faith, the apostle desires for him grace, mercy, and peace; but, thinking of him as a believer, he now says, “from God *our Father*” and Christ Jesus “our Lord”.

(b) The Charge and its End (*verses 3-5*)

Following upon the greeting, the apostle at once sets forth the special purpose for which he writes to Timothy. In the first place he writes to insist upon the presentation of the doctrines of grace; secondly, he exhorts to a right spiritual condition in order to be a true witness to grace.

(V. 3). As to the doctrine, the apostle having laboured at Ephesus for two years and three months, declaring to the saints all the counsel of God, it might be thought that there would be little danger of false doctrines being taught in their midst. It was not so, however, for the apostle realised that there were “some” who were ready to teach “other doctrines” even amongst those who had the greatest light. The natural pride of the heart may think that much light is a safeguard against error. It is well for us to learn, by the example of the Ephesian assembly, that the fact of a company being enriched with truth, and enjoying the highest ministry, is no guarantee against false doctrine. Timothy, then, was to charge some that they teach no other doctrine than the great doctrines of the grace of God.

(V. 4). Letting go the truth, we become occupied with fables and interminable genealogies which may appeal to reason, but only occupy the mind with questions and do not lead to godly edifying which is in faith. “Endless genealogies” are as pleasing to the natural mind as to religious flesh, for they shut out God and make much of man. “Interminable genealogies” assume that all blessing is a process of development handed down from one generation to another. For this reason, the religious Jew made a great deal of his genealogy. So, too, the man of the world, with his science falsely so-called, seeks to shut out faith in a Creator by speculative theories which view everything in creation as a gradual and genealogical development of one thing from another. Human speculations, appealing to reason, can only raise “questions” which leave the soul in darkness and doubt. Divine truth, appealing to conscience and faith, can alone give certainty and godly edification.

(V. 5). Having warned against false doctrine, the apostle passes on to speak of the end of the charge. The end he has in view is a right spiritual condition which alone will enable us to maintain the truth and escape error. We shall only be kept as we hold the truth in conjunction with “love out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned”. Sound doctrine can only be maintained with a right moral condition.

Speculative questions can be raised and discussed by the human mind apart from a right moral condition of soul, for they leave the conscience and affections untouched, and therefore do not bring the soul into the presence of God. In contrast with man's speculations, the truth of God can only be apprehended by faith. Acting upon the conscience and the heart, the truth leads to the strengthening of the moral relations of the soul with God. Thus the truth edifies by leading to love out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. To exhort to these practical results was the great *end* of the charge to the Ephesian believers. The charge was not to do some great service or make some great sacrifice. It was not *doing* great things before men, but *being* in a right condition before God. Love in the heart, “a good conscience”, and “faith unfeigned” are qualities which God alone can see, though others may see the effect they produce in the life.

Thus, in these opening verses, the apostle brings before us the charge to teach no other doctrines than the doctrines of grace, and the necessity of a right spiritual condition in order to maintain the truth and be preserved from error.

(c) Warnings against neglecting the charge (*verses 6, 7*)

(Vv. 6, 7). Having pressed upon us the deep importance of a right spiritual condition, the apostle, before continuing his instruction, warns us in a parenthesis against the solemn results of lacking these moral qualities.

There were some in the Christian circle who had missed these great spiritual qualities of Christianity. Lacking them, they turned aside from the truth to vain discourse. Christianity, based upon the grace of God, brings the soul in heart and conscience into the presence of God. When this grace is “missed”, religious flesh turns aside to vain words, leading men to become “law-teachers”. Such neither realise the bearing of their false teaching, nor do they understand the true use of the law which they so strenuously affirm.

What a solemn condemnation is the apostle's warning of the greater part of the teaching that flows from the pulpits of Christendom. Having missed the true grace of Christianity and its effects, the Christian profession has turned aside to vain discourse and the teaching of the law, with the result that the pure gospel of the grace of God is seldom proclaimed.

(d) The right use of law and the superiority of grace (*verses 8-17*)

(V. 8). The apostle equally condemns those who turn aside to fables of the human imagination and those who desire to be teachers of the law. Nevertheless, there is a great difference between human fables and the divinely given law. Therefore, while condemning the law teachers, the apostle is careful to maintain the holiness of the law. Fables are wholly bad, but the law is good if used lawfully.

(Vv. 9-11). The apostle proceeds to explain the right use of the law. He asserts that the law is not made for a righteous man. It is neither a means of blessing for a sinner, nor a rule of life for the believer. Its lawful use is to convict sinners of their sins, by witnessing to the holy judgment of God against every kind of sin.

Moreover, the sins enumerated by the apostle, as indeed all other sins, are not only condemned by

the law, but are contrary to the “sound teaching” of the gospel of the glory of God. The law is, in this respect, entirely in accord with the gospel. Both witness to the holiness of God, and for this reason both are intolerant of sin.

Nevertheless, the glad tidings of the glory of God, in the blessing that is proclaimed to man, far surpass any good that the law could accomplish. For the gospel, entrusted to the apostle, reveals the grace of God that can bless the chief of sinners.

(V. 12). This leads the apostle to declare the grace of the glad tidings as illustrated in his own history. Sovereign grace had not only saved the apostle, but, having done so, counted him faithful and appointed him to the ministry of the truth.

(V. 13). To show the surpassing greatness of this grace, the apostle refers to his character as an unconverted man. In those days he was “a blasphemer and persecutor, and an insolent overbearing man”. He not only linked himself with Jewish high priests in resisting the Holy Spirit at Jerusalem, but he was their active agent in carrying this opposition to foreign cities. He blasphemed the Name of Christ, persecuted the saints of Christ, and, being zealous of the law, was insolently overbearing in his attitude towards grace.

Such was the man in whom God was pleased to set forth His mercy (v. 13), His grace (v. 14) and His long-suffering (v. 16). As an individual he was the object of God's mercy because, however intense his opposition to Christ, he had acted in ignorance and unbelief. So ignorant was he of the truth and of Christ, that he honestly thought he was doing God's service in seeking to stamp out the Name of Christ. He was not as one who, having been made acquainted with the truth of the gospel, willingly and deliberately opposes and rejects it.

(V. 14). Thus, in the mercy of God, the grace of our Lord was revealed to him as that which “surpassingly over-abounded” above all his sin. The discovery of the sin of his heart, and the grace of the heart of Christ to such a sinner, was accompanied with “faith and love” that had their object in Christ.

(Vv. 15, 16). Having been blessed, the apostle becomes a herald of the grace of God to a world of sinners, and a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Christ to life everlasting.

(V. 17). The recital of this surpassing grace leads the apostle to break out in praise to “the King of the ages, the incorruptible, invisible, only God”. To Him he would render “honour and glory to the ages of ages”. Paul, when zealous for the law, was simply a man of the present age, seeking to maintain the age of the law. God is the “King of the ages” Who is acting in sovereign grace for His own glory throughout the ages of ages.

(e) The special charge to Timothy (*verses 18-20*)

Having shown the right use of the law, and the over-abounding character of grace, the apostle resumes the thread of his discourse from verse 5.

(Vv. 18-20). To Timothy his child he commits this charge of which he had already spoken in verses 3 and 5. Timothy was to act with all the authority conferred by the apostle, according to prophecies as to the service that had been marked out for him. To carry out this service would involve warfare. This conflict to be successful would require that the faith be tenaciously held. Faith in this passage is, as one has said, “the doctrine of Christianity ... that which God had revealed, received with certainty as such — as *the truth*” (J.N.D.).

Moreover, the truth must be held with a good conscience, so that the soul is kept in communion

with God. How often the heresies into which believers fall have their secret root in some indulged and unjudged sin which defiles the conscience, robs the soul of communion with God, and leaves it a prey to the influences of Satan.

Some, indeed, in the apostle's day, had put away a good conscience and so fallen into errors that made shipwreck of the faith. Two men are named, Hymenæus and Alexander, who had listened to Satan and made blasphemous statements. By apostolic power they had been delivered to Satan. Inside the house of God there was the protection of the Holy Spirit. Outside the assembly there is the world under the power of Satan. These men were allowed to come under the power of Satan, that, through suffering and anguish of soul, they might learn the true character of the flesh and turn to God in humbleness and brokenness of spirit.

3 The Order of God's House

(1 Timothy 2 and 1 Timothy 3)

In this division of the Epistle, the apostle sets forth the character of God's house (1 Tim. 2: 1-4); the testimony to the grace of God that is to flow from the house (1 Tim. 2: 5-7); the conduct proper to men and women who form the house (1 Tim. 2: 8-15); the qualifications necessary to those who exercise office in the house (1 Tim. 3: 1-13); and, finally, the mystery of piety (1 Tim. 3: 14-16).

(a) The house of God, a house of prayer for all nations (1 Tim. 1: 1-4) (Isa. 56: 7; Mark 11: 17)

(V. 1). The house of God is characterised as the place of prayer. The petitions that ascend to God from His house are to be marked by “supplications”, or earnest pleadings, for special needs arising in particular circumstances; by “prayers”, which express general desires appropriate for all times; by “intercessions”, implying that believers are in that nearness to God that can plead on behalf of others; and, lastly, by “thanksgiving”, which speaks of a heart conscious of the goodness of God that delights to answer the prayers of His people.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians, which presents the truth of the church in its heavenly calling, we are exhorted to pray with supplication “for all saints” (Ephesians 6: 18). Here, where the church is viewed as the vessel for the testimony of the grace of God, we are to pray with supplication “for all men”.

(V. 2). Especially we are called upon to pray for kings and all that are in authority — those who are in a position to influence the world for good or evil. It is not simply for “the king” or “our king” for whom we are to pray, but “for kings”. This presumes that we realise our link with the Lord's people all the world over as forming part of the house of God, and the true position of the church as standing in holy separation from the world, taking no part in its politics or government. In the world, but not of it, the church has the high privilege of praying, interceding and giving thanks on behalf of those who do not pray for themselves.

The apostle gives two reasons for the prayers for all men. Firstly, prayer for kings and all in authority is called for in view of the Lord's people throughout the world. We are to seek that the sovereign goodness of God may so control the rulers of this world that His people may lead “a quiet and tranquil life in all piety and gravity”. It is evidently God's mind that His people should, in passing

through this hostile world, lead a quiet life, not asserting themselves as if they were citizens of this world, in tranquillity that refrains from taking part in the world's disputes, in piety that recognises God in every circumstance of life, and in practical gravity before men. Of old the prophet Jeremiah sent a letter to God's captive people in Babylon, exhorting them to seek the peace of the city in which they were held in bondage, by praying unto the Lord for it: for, says the prophet, "in the peace thereof shall ye have peace" (Jeremiah 29: 7). In the same spirit we are to seek the peace of the world, in order that God's people may have peace.

(Vv. 3, 4). Then a second reason is given for the prayers of God's people on behalf of all men. To pray for all men is "good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved." We are to pray, not only in view of the good of all saints, but also in view of the blessing of all men.

The world may at times persecute God's people and seek to vent upon them all the hatred of their hearts towards God. Unless we walk in self-judgment, such treatment would arouse the flesh in resentment and retaliation. Here we learn that it is "good and acceptable in the sight of God" to act and feel towards all men, as God Himself does, in love and grace. Thus we are to pray for "all men", not simply for those who govern well, but also for those who use God's people spitefully (Luke 6: 28). We are to pray, not for retributive judgment to overtake the persecutors of God's people, but that in sovereign grace they may be saved.

(b) The house of God, a witness to the grace of God (verses 5-7)

The house of God is not only to be the place from which prayer ascends to God, but also the place from which a testimony flows out to man. In due time God will deal in judgment with the wicked, and even now at times may deal governmentally with those who set themselves to oppose the grace of God and the ministers of His grace, as in the smiting of Herod, and the blinding of Elymas (Acts 12: 23; Acts 13: 6-11). Moreover, God may, on solemn occasions, deal in governmental judgment with those who form the house of God for the maintenance of the holiness of His house, as set forth in the terrible judgment that overtook Ananias and Sapphira; and later the governmental dealing by which some in the Corinthian assembly were taken away in judgment (Acts 5: 1-10); 1 Corinthians 11: 30-32). Such cases, however, are the result of the direct dealing of God. The house of God, as such, is to be a testimony to God as a Saviour God, who desires all men to be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth.

The "will" of God, in this passage, has no reference to the counsels of God which will most certainly be fulfilled. It expresses the disposition of God towards all. God presents Himself as a Saviour God who is willing that all may be saved. But, if men are to be saved, it can only be through faith that acknowledges "the truth". Of this truth the house of God is "the pillar and base" (1 Timothy 3: 15). As long as the assembly is on earth, it is the witness to, and support of, the truth. When the church is caught away, men will at once fall into apostasy and be given up to a strong delusion.

(V. 5). Two great truths are brought before us as the ground on which God deals with men in sovereign grace. Firstly, there is one God; secondly, there is one Mediator.

That there is only one God had been fully declared before Christ came. The unity of God is the great foundation truth of the Old Testament. It was the great testimony to Israel, as we read, "Hear O Israel: the LORD our God is One LORD" (Deuteronomy 6: 4). It was the great testimony that was to flow out to the nations from Israel, as we read, "Let all the nations be gathered together ... let them hear, and say, It is truth. Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen:

that ye may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside Me there is no Saviour” (Isaiah 43: 9-11).

Christianity, while fully maintaining the great truth that there is one God, further presents the equally important truth that there is one Mediator between God and men. This latter truth is the distinctive truth of Christianity.

Three great truths are presented as characterising the Mediator. First He is *one*. If God is one, it is equally important to remember the unity of the Mediator. There is one Mediator and no other. The papacy, and other corrupt religious systems of Christendom, have denied this great truth, and detracted from the glory of the one Mediator, by setting up Mary, the mother of the Lord, and other canonised men and women as mediators.

Secondly, the One Mediator is a Man in order that God may be known to men. Man cannot rise to God; but God, in His love, can come down to man. One has said, “He came down into the lowest depths in order that there should be none, even of the most wretched, who could not feel that God in His goodness was near him — come down to him — His love finding its occasion in misery; and that there was no need to which He was not present, which He could not meet” (J.N.D.).

(Vv. 6, 7). Thirdly, this Mediator gave Himself a ransom for all. If God is to be proclaimed as a Saviour God, who will have all men to be saved, His holiness must be vindicated and His glory maintained. This has been perfectly accomplished by the propitiatory work of Christ. God's majesty, righteousness, love, truth, and all that He is, have been glorified in the work wrought by Christ. He is a propitiation for the whole world. All has been done that is needed. His blood is available for the vilest whoever he may be. Hence the gospel to the world says, “Whosoever will, let him come.” In this aspect we may say Christ died for all, gave Himself a ransom for all, an available sacrifice for sin, for whosoever would come. These are the great truths to be testified in due time — the grace of God proclaiming forgiveness and salvation to all on the ground of the work of Christ, who has given Himself a ransom for all. When Christ had ascended to glory, and the Holy Ghost had come down to earth to dwell in the midst of believers, thus forming them into the house of God, the due time had come. From that house the testimony was to flow forth, the apostle being the one used of God to preach grace, and thus open the door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts 14: 27). He can thus speak of himself as a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles in the faith and in the truth.

(c) The conduct proper to men and women who form the house (verses 8-15)

We have seen in the early part of the chapter that the house of God is the place of prayer “for all men” (verse 1), the witness of God's disposition in grace toward “all men” (verse 4), and the witness who gave Himself a ransom “for all” (verse 6).

If such is the great purpose of the house of God, it follows that nothing is to be allowed in the house of God that would mar this testimony either on the part of men or women who form the house. Thus the apostle proceeds to give detailed instructions as to the deportment of each class. This testimony to the grace of God does not contemplate a number of believers, interested in a particular testimony, binding themselves together for service. It is not a band of evangelists giving themselves to gospel work or missionary service. It presents all the saint sharing a common interest in the testimony that flows from the house of God.

(V. 8). Firstly, the apostle speaks of men in contrast with women. The men in the house of God

are to be marked by prayer. The apostle is speaking of public prayer, and on such occasions the title to pray is restricted to men. Moreover, the instruction contains no thought of an official class leading in prayer. Praying in public is not confined to elders, or to gifted men, for prayer is never treated in Scripture as a question of gift. It is men that are to pray and the only restriction is that a right moral condition is to be maintained. Those who lead in public prayer are to be marked by holiness, and their prayers are to be without wrath or reasoning. The man that is conscious of unjudged evil in his life is in no condition to pray. Moreover, the prayer is to be without wrath. This is an exhortation that utterly condemns the use of prayer to make veiled attacks upon others. Behind such prayers there is always wrath or malice. Moreover, the prayer is to be in the simplicity of faith and not with vain human reasoning.

(V. 9). The women are to be marked by “decent deportment and dress” (N.T.). This better translation clearly indicates that not only in dress but in their general bearing women should be marked by modesty that shrinks from all impropriety, and “discretion” that leads to care in their words and ways. They are to beware of using the hair that God has given as the woman's glory for an expression of the natural vanity of the human heart. Women are not to seek to call attention to themselves by arraying themselves in “gold, or pearls, or costly clothing”. Again, women do well to remember that they may obey this Scripture in the letter and yet miss the spirit of it by affecting some peculiar garb, thus calling attention to themselves.

The woman professing the fear of God will be marked, not by the affection of superior spirituality, but by “good works”. Their place in Christianity is seemly and beautiful: it is found in those “good works”, many of which can alone be carried out by a woman.

We see, in the Gospels, how women ministered unto Christ of their substance (Luke 8: 3). Mary wrought a good work upon the Lord when she anointed His head with the precious ointment (Matthew 26: 7-10). Dorcas did a good work in making garments for the poor (Acts 9: 39). Mary, the mother of John Mark, opened her house for many to gather together in prayer (Acts 12: 12). Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened, did a good work when she opened her house to the servants of the Lord (Acts 16: 14, 15). Priscilla did a good work when, with her husband, she helped Apollos to know “the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18: 26). Phoebe, of Cenchrea, was “a succourer of many” (Romans 16: 2). Other Scriptures tell us that godly women can wash the saints' feet, relieve the afflicted, bring up children and guide the home. Here we read that in public the woman is to learn in silence. She is not to usurp authority over the man.

The apostle gives two reasons for the subjection of woman to man. Firstly, Adam has the pre-eminent place, inasmuch as he was first formed, then Eve. A second reason is that Adam was not deceived; the woman was. In a certain sense Adam was worse than the woman, for he sinned knowingly. Nevertheless, the truth pressed by the apostle is that woman showed her weakness in that she was beguiled. Adam, indeed, should have maintained his authority and have led the woman in obedience. She, in weakness, was beguiled, usurped the place of authority, and led the man in disobedience. The Christian woman recognises this and is careful to keep in the place of subjection and quietness.

(V. 15). Eve suffered for her transgression, but the Christian woman will find the mercy of God abounding over governmental judgment, if the married man and woman continue in faith and love and holiness with discretion. As before we saw the continuance in sound teaching is so largely dependent upon a right moral condition (1 Timothy 1: 5, 6); so now we see temporal mercy is connected with a right spiritual state.

(d) Oversight in the church of God (verses 1-13)

(V. 1). The apostle has spoken of the relative position of men and women, and the conduct suitable to such in the house of God. This prepares the way for instruction as to oversight in the church of God. The apostle says, "If any one aspires to exercise *oversight*, he desires a good work" (N.T.).

In the apostle's address to the elders at Ephesus, three things are brought before us as characterising oversight. Firstly, the overseers are to take heed to themselves and "to all the flock". They are to seek that their own walk, and the walk of the Lord's people, may be worthy of the Lord. Secondly, they are to "feed the church of God." They think, not only of the practical walk of God's people, but they seek the welfare of their souls, that they may enter into their Christian privileges and make soul progress in the truth. Thirdly, they are to "watch" over the flock that it may be preserved from the attacks of the enemy without, as well as from the corruptions that may arise within the Christian circle through perverse men who divert souls from the Lord to themselves (Acts 20: 28-31).

Such was the work of oversight, and the apostle speaks of it as "a good work". There is the testimony of the grace of God that is to flow out from the house of God, and already the apostle has spoken of this as "good and acceptable in the sight of God." There is also the care of those who compose the house of God, that their behaviour may be suited to the house, and this care for souls is also "a good work".

It is important to remember that the apostle is not speaking of "gifts", but of local office for the care of the assembly. Christendom has confused gifts with offices or charges. In Scripture they are quite distinct. The gifts are given from the ascended Head and are "set" in the church (Ephesians 4: 8-11; 1 Corinthians 12: 28). The exercise of the gift cannot then be confined to a local assembly. The office of overseer is purely local.

Moreover, there is nothing in the instruction as to ordination of individuals to these offices. Timothy and Titus may be authorised by the apostle to ordain (or "establish") elders (Titus 1: 5), but there is no instruction for elders to appoint elders, or for the assembly to choose elders.

The fact that these servants were authorised by the apostle to establish elders clearly proves that, in the apostle's day, there were assemblies in which there were no appointed overseers. They lacked duly appointed elders for want of apostolic authority (direct or indirect) to appoint them. It is plain, then, from Scripture, that there can be no elders officially appointed except by an apostle or his delegates. It would appear that for man to appoint elders or ordain ministers is to act without the warrant of Scripture.

This does not imply that the work of the overseer cannot be done, or that there are not those fitted for the work in a day of breakdown. The work of overseers was never more needed than today, and those who are scripturally qualified for the work can in simplicity serve the Lord's people in their own locality; and it is well for us to recognise such, ever keeping in mind the exact force of the apostle's words, when he says, "If any one aspires to exercise oversight, he desires a good work." The apostle does not speak of a man desiring "office" in order to hold a position or exercise authority, but of the desire to exercise this "good work". The flesh likes office, and position, and authority, but it will shrink from "work". When this is seen, we may have to admit that there are few that have the desire that the apostle contemplates.

(Vv. 2, 3). The qualities that should mark such are clearly set before us; and, as one has said, "The directions even as to elders and deacons are not, so to speak, merely for their own sake; they show us the character that God values and seeks from His people" (F.W.G.).

The moral character of the elder must be above reproach. He must be the husband of one wife, a qualification that would have special application to those emerging from heathenism with its polygamy. A converted man, though not to be rejected because he had more than one wife, would be unfitted for oversight. Moreover, such an one was to be sober in judgment, discreet in his words, decorous in behaviour, hospitable. He was to be apt to teach, not necessarily implying that he was gifted as a teacher, but that he had aptness to help others in their spiritual exercises. He was not to be a person given to excess in wine or violence in action; on the contrary he was to be mild, avoiding contentions and free from covetousness.

(Vv. 4, 5). Moreover, he was to be one who ruled his house well, having his children in subjection — exhortations that clearly indicate that the overseer was to be an elder, not only married and possessing a home, but having children.

(V. 6). He was not to be a novice. A young Christian may be used of the Lord to preach to others as soon as he is converted, but for such to take the place of an overseer would obviously be wrong, and probably lead to his falling into the fault of the devil. The fault of the devil, one has truly said, was that “he exalted himself at the thought of his own importance” (J.N.D.).

(V. 7). Finally, the overseer must have a good testimony from those without, otherwise he will fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. The snare of the enemy is to entrap the believer into some questionable conduct before the world, so that he can no longer deal with questionable conduct among the saints.

(V. 8). The apostle further gives us the necessary qualifications for deacons. The deacon is a minister, or one who serves. From Acts 6 we learn that his special work is described as “serving tables” and, as the connection shows, this refers to meeting the bodily and temporal needs of the assembly, in contrast with the work of the overseer which is more especially concerned with meeting spiritual needs. Nevertheless, it is none the less necessary that the deacon should have spiritual qualifications. Those chosen for deacons' work, in the early church at Jerusalem, were to be men “well reported of, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6: 3). Here we learn that, like the overseers, they were to be grave, not double-tongued, not given to excess of wine or covetousness.

(V. 9). Further, they were to be marked by “holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.” To hold correct doctrine is not enough. Orthodoxy without a pure conscience would indicate how little the truth has power over its possessor; hence how powerless such would be to affect others.

(V. 10). Moreover, the deacons must be those who have been tested and proved by experience to be blameless in their own conduct and thus capable of dealing with matters that would of necessity come before them in their service.

(Vv. 11, 12). Their wives were also to be grave, not slanderers, and faithful in all things. Their character is specially referred to, inasmuch as the service of the deacons, having to do with temporal needs, might give occasion for the wives to make mischief unless “faithful in all things”. Like the overseers, the deacons are to be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their homes well. Again, these exhortations imply that the deacon is not a young man, but one that is married and has children, and thus a man with experience.

(V. 13). In case it might be thought that the office of a deacon was inferior to that of an overseer, the apostle specially states that those who use the office of a deacon well obtain for themselves a good degree, and much boldness in faith which is in Christ Jesus — a truth, as it has often been pointed out,

strikingly illustrated in the history of Stephen (Acts 6: 1-5, 8-15).

(e) The mystery of piety (verses 14-16)

(Vv. 14, 15). The apostle closes this portion of his Epistle by definitely stating that his reason for writing “these things” is that Timothy might know how one ought to behave oneself in the house of God.

We are told that the house of God is “the assembly of the living God”. It is no longer a building of material stones, as in the Old Testament days, but a company of living stones — believers. It is formed of all believers living on earth at any given moment. No local assembly is ever called the house of God.

Further, it is the assembly of the *living God*. The God who dwells in the midst of His people is not like the dead idols that men worship, that can neither see nor hear. That our God is living is a truth of blessed but solemn import, but one we can easily forget. Later the apostle can tell us that we can “both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God” (1 Timothy 4: 10). The living God is a God that delights to support and bless His people; nevertheless, if the holiness that becomes His house is not maintained, God may make manifest that He is the living God in solemn governmental dealings as with Ananias and Sapphira, who experienced the truth of the words, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10: 31).

Moreover, we learn that the house of God is the pillar and base of the truth. The “pillar” presents the thought of witness; the “base” is that which supports. The house of God is not said to be the truth, but the “pillar” or witness of the truth. Christ on earth was “the truth” (John 14: 6); and again we read, “Thy word is truth” (John 17: 17). However much the assembly may have failed in its responsibilities, the fact remains that, as established of God upon earth, it is the witness and support of the truth. God has no other witness on the earth. In a day of ruin it may be only a feeble few who will maintain the truth, while the great professing mass, failing to be a witness, will be spued out of the mouth of Christ.

It is important to remember that the assembly is not said to teach the truth, but to witness to the truth that is already found in the word of God. Nor can the assembly claim authority to decide what is truth. The word is the truth and carries its own authority.

(V. 16). As the assembly is the house of God — the living God — and the witness and support of the truth, how important that we should know how to behave ourselves in the house of God. In view of pious behaviour the apostle speaks of “the mystery of piety”, or the secret of right behaviour. One has written of this passage, “This is often quoted and interpreted as if it spoke of the mystery of the Godhead, or the mystery of Christ’s Person. But it is the mystery of godliness, or the secret by which all real godliness is produced — the divine spring of all that can be called piety in man” (J.N.D.). This mystery of piety is what is known to piety, but not yet manifest to the world. The secret of godliness lies *in the knowledge of God manifested in and through the Person of Christ*. Thus in this beautiful passage we have Christ presented as making God known to men and angels. In Christ, God was manifest in the flesh. The absolute holiness of Christ was seen in that He was justified in the Spirit. We are justified in the death of Christ: He was sealed and anointed altogether apart from death — the proof of His intrinsic holiness. Then, in Christ, as Man, God was seen of angels. In Christ, He was made known to and believed on in the world. Finally, the heart of God is made known by the present position of Christ in the glory.

All this is spoken of as “the mystery of godliness”, because these things are not known to the unbeliever. Such, indeed, can appreciate the outward conduct that flows from piety; but the unbeliever

cannot know the secret spring of piety. That secret is only known to the pious; and the secret lies in the knowledge of God; and the knowledge of God has been revealed to them in Christ.

4 Warnings against Religious Flesh and Instruction in Piety

(1 Timothy 4)

Having instructed us in the order of God's house and the secret of all right behaviour on the part of those who form the house, the apostle, in the remainder of the Epistle, warns us against certain fleshly activities that are destructive of right behaviour, and instructs us as to true piety that alone will guard the faithful from these different evils.

In 1 Timothy 4 the apostle warns more especially against apostasy, and religious flesh manifesting itself in the false principle of asceticism. In 1 Timothy 5 we are warned against worldly flesh, showing itself in wantonness and self-gratification. In 1 Timothy 6 we are warned against covetous flesh with its love of money.

The safeguard against these evils is found in "godliness". The truth of godliness (or, according to the better translation, "piety") has a very prominent place in this First Epistle to Timothy. The word is used sixteen times in the New Testament, nine of these occasions being found in this Epistle (1 Tim. 2: 2; 1 Tim. 3: 16; 1 Tim. 4: 7, 8; 1 Tim. 5: 4; 1 Tim. 6: 3, 5, 6, 11). Piety is the confidence in the known and living God that leads the believer to walk in the holy fear of God amidst all the circumstances of life. It recognises and honours God, and is therefore the very opposite of sanctimoniousness that seeks to exalt self.

In chapter iv the apostle first warns us against the apostasy of some who turn from Christianity to a religion of the flesh (verses 1-5); then he brings before us the life of piety as that which will guard the soul from the evils of the flesh (verses 6-10); finally, the apostle gives personal exhortations to Timothy, containing instruction and guidance for all the Lord's servants (verses 11-16).

(a) Warnings against religious flesh or asceticism (verses 1-5)

The apostle has closed the previous portion of the Epistle with a beautiful unfolding of "the faith" setting forth the great truth of Christianity as the manifestation of God in Christ. Now the Spirit expressly warns that, in the latter times of the Christian profession, some will depart, or apostatise, from the faith. Later, the apostle warns us that some, by their practice, will *deny the faith* (v. 8); some, by covetousness, will *wander from the faith* (1 Timothy 6: 10); and some, by speculation, will *miss the faith* (1 Timothy 6: 21).

(Vv. 1, 2). Here he speaks of apostatising from the faith. Clearly, the apostle is not speaking of the great apostasy foretold in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, which refers to the apostasy of Christendom as a whole after the rapture of the church. In this passage the apostle says "some shall apostatise", evidently referring to the apostasy of individuals taking place in the latter days before the coming of the Lord.

While the assembly of God is still on earth, there will arise those who once made a profession of Christianity but who give up the great cardinal truths of the Christian faith concerning the Person of Christ.

(V. 3). Behind this apostasy there is the direct influence of seducing spirits leading to the

doctrines of demons in contrast with the truth. The apostate is not simply one who neglects the truth, nor rejects the truth. He is one who, having made a profession of the faith, deliberately gives up the truth and takes up some other religious creed as being superior to Christianity. The demons speak lies while professing to maintain the truth. The devil we know “is a liar” (John 8: 44) and beguiled our first parents by speaking lies in hypocrisy. The fact that the truth has no power over their souls and that they give heed to doctrines of demons clearly proves that their consciences are so seared that they are no longer able to distinguish between good and evil. Apostasy, then, involves not only the giving up the truth but also the adoption of error — the doctrine of demons.

In place of the truth the apostate affects a religion of the flesh which professes to be of the very highest sanctity. They make the assumption of extraordinary purity by forbidding to marry, and great self-denial by abstinence from meats. In reality, having turned from the faith, they deny God as our Saviour and, in refusing marriage and meats, they deny God as the Creator. This means the loss of all true piety which fears God, and in result opens the door to licence and wantonness. These seducing spirits, pandering to the pride of the flesh, hold out before men the promise of the greatest sanctity in order to lead them into the deepest corruption.

(V. 4). True piety avails itself of every mercy which God places within our reach. The mercies of marriage and meats, which are rejected by those who depart from the faith, are to be received with thankfulness by those who believe and know the truth.

(V. 5). The world and its ways are not sanctioned by the word of God for the believer; but these natural mercies, which are available for all the world, are set apart for our comfort while passing through the world. Nevertheless, their use is guarded for the believer by the word of God and prayer. The word of God regulates their use, and by prayer the believer takes them up in dependence upon God.

(b) Piety or trust in the living God (verses 6-10)

(V. 6). The apostle has set before us certain dangers against which the Spirit expressly warns us. Timothy was to put the brethren in remembrance of these things, and so doing would prove himself to be a good servant of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine with which he was fully acquainted. The seducing spirits, of which the Holy Spirit speaks, sought to exalt man with a sense of religious importance and sanctity. The true servant seeks to exalt Christ by ministering the truth.

To be a good servant of Jesus Christ it is not enough to know the truth, and hold the truth; we need to be nourished by the truth, and, in practice, to follow up fully the truth. Our own souls must be fed if we are to feed others. We must be nourished, not simply in the words of teachers, however true, but “with the words of the faith” which convey to us “the good teaching” of Christianity and, if followed up, will produce a practical effect in our lives, preserving us from the evils of the latter times.

(V. 7). Having exhorted us to follow the truth, the apostle warns us to refuse all that which is outside “the words of the faith”. The imaginations of men will always tend to profanity and foolishness, which the apostle characterises with contempt as “old wives' fables”. Our great “exercise” should be to be found walking in piety. We may put service first; but there is ever the grave danger of being active in service while neglecting personal piety. The good servant will exercise himself unto piety that he may be “meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work.” We may, at times, like the Corinthian saints, be very active in service and boast in our gifts, and like them be very unspiritual through not exercising ourselves unto piety.

(V. 8). To emphasise the importance of spiritual exercise as to piety, the apostle contrasts it with “bodily exercise”. The allusion is probably to the public games, as in 1 Corinthians 9: 24, 25, where, in speaking of the public races, he says, “Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things”. He continues to warn us in that passage that such exercise in temperance has only a passing advantage; at best it obtains only “a corruptible crown”, in contrast with the “incorruptible” which the Christian has in view. So here, he says, that this bodily exercise is only profitable in some small things; but the spiritual exercise of piety is profitable unto all things, being rich with blessing in this life as well as in that which is to come.

(Vv. 9, 10). The apostle presses the importance of this exercise as to piety by stating, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation.” It was because of his piety that the apostle can say, “For this we labour and suffer reproach.” We may be prepared to labour and be prominent before men, and thus labour and gain applause, or labour to exalt self. But if piety is behind our labour, it will inevitably mean labour *and reproach*.

The apostle proceeds to show that the spring of piety is confidence in God. We trust in the living God who is the preserver of all men, specially of those that believe. Piety is that individual confidence in God that takes up every circumstance of life in relation to God. The unregenerate man leaves God out of his life; the believer recognises Him in all the details of life and thankfully receives and uses every mercy that He places within his reach without abusing the mercies. Thus, piety is the antidote to all the evil influences of the latter days, whether the evil takes the form of asceticism, celibacy, abstinence from meats (1 Timothy 4: 3), neglecting one's own house and living in habits of self-indulgence (1 Timothy 5: 4-6), or attaching importance to worldly advantage and money (1 Timothy 6: 3-10).

(c) Personal precepts for the servant of the Lord (verses 11-16)

(Vv. 11, 12). These things Timothy was to enjoin and teach. Being a young man he was to be specially on his guard against any assumption or youthful pride which would mar his testimony by leading him to be despised because of his youth. If his exhortations and instructions to others were to be effectual, he would have, in his life, to “be a model of the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” Alas! how often we mar our testimony through failing to exhibit these beautiful qualities of Christ. If the truths we teach do not affect our own lives, can we expect our teaching to affect others?

(V. 13). His own life being pure, the servant would be free in seeking to help others by reading, exhortation and teaching. The connection of reading with exhortation would seem to show that the “reading” has no reference to his personal study, but rather to the public reading of the Scriptures, which in those days had a place of special importance.

(V. 14). Moreover, in the case of Timothy, a gift for ministry had been imparted to him, and for which he had been specially marked out by a prophetic word from God, and with which the elderhood had expressed their fellowship by the laying on of hands. Such prophecy and laying on of hands had been fully set forth in the case of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13: 2, 3). However right and beautiful the Christian life, it would not enable the servant to take the definite place of a teacher. For this a gift from the Lord was necessary. In Timothy's case he could go forward in the confidence that this gift had been imparted by a direct word from God, and could be exercised in the consciousness that he had the full fellowship of the elders of the Lord's people. The gift had been given by prophecy, and by the laying on of Paul's hands (2 Timothy 1: 6). It had not been given by the laying on of the elders' hands: they laid

their hands on Timothy as expressing their fellowship with him. Thus encouraged, he was to beware of neglecting the gift through any natural timidity.

(V. 15). Thus strengthened and encouraged, Timothy was to devote himself to the Lord's things, as the apostle says, "Occupy thyself with these things" (N.T.). Too often we allow ourselves to be distracted by other objects than the Lord and His interests. Good for us to embrace heartily Christianity and make the things of the Lord our interest — to "be wholly in them" (N.T.). Then, indeed, our spiritual progress would be manifest to all.

(V. 16). The apostle sums up his exhortation to Timothy by saying, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine". To press the doctrine while careless of our own walk, or to make much of personal piety while asserting that it is of small matter what we hold, are two snares into which many have fallen. Both alike are fatal to all true testimony. It is only as we take heed to ourselves and to the doctrine that we shall both save ourselves and those that hear us from the evils of the latter times.

5 Warnings against Worldliness and Instruction in Piety

(1 Timothy 5)

Having warned against the evil of some who will apostatise from Christianity and adopt a false religion of the flesh, the apostle now warns us against evils that may arise from worldliness within the Christian circle, and instructs how to deal with the needs of God's people so that nothing may be allowed that would be an occasion for reproach and thus hinder the testimony of God's grace before the world.

(a) The spirit in which wrongs are to be dealt with (verses 1, 2)

Occasions may arise when evils are manifested in the Christian circle that rightly call for rebuke. Nevertheless, in administering rebuke we are to recognise what is due to age and sex, and thus be careful that the rebuke is given in a right spirit. The rebuke may be right and yet have no effect, or even do harm, because of the wrong spirit in which it is given. A right rebuke in a wrong spirit is simply meeting the flesh in the flesh.

Age is to be respected, even if rebuke is called for. An elder brother is not to be rebuked sharply (N.T.), but exhorted with all the deference that a son would pay to a father. The younger men are not to be treated as of little account, but rebuked with love as brethren, the elder women with the deference due to a mother. Younger women are to be dealt with in "all purity", thus avoiding the careless familiarity that nature might adopt.

Thus in all our dealings with one another the manner is to be such that nothing is done that would outrage propriety and give occasion for scandal.

(b) Instruction as to meeting the needs of God's people and warnings against self-indulgence in temporal things (verses 3-16)

(V. 3). Firstly, we are instructed to pay due regard to widows who are "widows indeed". A "widow indeed" is not simply a person bereft of her husband, but one marked by certain moral qualities. Whether in need or not, such are to be held in honour.

(V. 4). If, however, such are in temporal need, let the descendants prove their practical piety by rendering a return to their parents, for this is good and acceptable before God. Here again we see that piety brings God into all the details of life, and seeks to act in a way that is pleasing to God.

(V. 5). The apostle then gives us the beautiful marks of one that is a “widow indeed”. She is desolate, being without human resources; her confidence is in God — she “trusteth in God” — and she is dependent upon God, for she “continueth in supplications and prayers night and day.”

(V. 6). In contrast with the widow indeed, the apostle warns us against any in the house of God abandoning themselves to “habits of self-indulgence” (N.T.). Such are dead while living. We are exhorted to reckon ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6: 11). We cannot live to self and God at the same time. If living to self we are living to sin, which is lawlessness, or the indulgence of our own wills. Habits of self-indulgence must bring in spiritual death between the soul and God.

(V. 7). Such warnings are necessary in order that, walking in piety, every one in the house of God may not only be acceptable and pleasing to God but also blameless before men.

(V. 8). For a Christian to fail in providing for his own, and especially for those of his own house, is to sink below what is natural, and thus deny the faith of Christianity which sanctions these natural relationships and teaches us to respect them. It is thus possible for a Christian, if acting in the flesh, to behave in a way that is “worse than the unbeliever.”

(Vv. 9, 10). There may, however, be needy individuals in the Christian circle, who have no relatives to provide for them. Such should be put upon the list of those who can be rightly cared for by the assembly. Nevertheless, one must take care not to use the house of God as if it were merely an institution for supporting needy people.

Grace may, indeed, on occasions help the most abandoned. Here it is a question of suitability for inclusion in a list of those who receive regular assistance from the Lord's people. Such must, by their lives, have proved their fitness for such help. In persons of normal health, the one suited for the list must be of an age when, under ordinary circumstances, she would no longer be able to work for her living; she must have been the wife of one husband, and one to whom an honourable testimony is borne by reason of her good works in bringing up children, in having shown kindness to strangers, in having refreshed the saints, comforted the afflicted, and, indeed, followed every good work.

Very blessedly this Scripture shows how much a godly woman can do that is pleasing to God and in helping the Lord's people. The omissions, however, are as striking as the good works that are enumerated. Nothing is said about teaching or preaching or, indeed, anything that would bring the woman into prominence in a public way contrary to the order of God's house.

(Vv. 11-13). The younger widows are not to be put upon the list. To provide for such, as in the case of widows indeed, would lead them to forget Christ as their one Object, and instead have before them simply the desire of remarrying, and thus become guilty of casting off their first faith. It is thus possible, not only to lose our first love, but to cast off our first faith which, at the start of our Christian life, made Christ the great Object.

Moreover, to put the younger widows on the list would only encourage them in idleness and thus become a snare, for their idleness would lead them to wander from house to house as “gossipers and meddlers” (N.T.). A gossip repeats tales and tittle-tattle to the disadvantage of others; a meddler interferes in the affairs of others, freely expressing opinions about matters which are not his concern. In neither case is there any thought of helping the needy, or seeking to put right any wrong, but rather the

indulgence of the flesh in its love of slander. Gossipers and meddlers, whether repeating what is false or true, are in either case “speaking things which they ought not.” The preacher says, “He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets (Proverbs 20: 19); and, again, “Every fool will be meddling” (Proverbs 20: 3). The law says, “Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people” (Leviticus 19: 16). Christianity warns us against “wandering about from house to house” as “gossipers and meddlers”.

What names have been wasted and broken;

What pestilent sinks have stirred

By a word in lightness spoken -

By only an idle word!

(V. 14). The judgment of the apostle is that the younger women should marry and find their proper sphere of activity in the home-life, bringing up children and guiding the house. Whether elders are addressed, or widows, or the younger women, all are to remember that they form part of the house of God, and in God's house nothing is to be allowed that will give occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

(V. 15). Through the neglect of these instructions some indeed had already turned aside after Satan. They might not admit or realise the seriousness of their course; but, evidently, to grow careless or wanton in relation to Christ would lead to the soul being beguiled by Satan and turning aside to the devil's temptations.

(V. 16). Widows in the families of Christians are to be relieved by the family, leaving the assembly free to assist those who are widows indeed.

(c) The needs of elders (verses 17-21)

The apostle passes on to instruct us as to meeting the needs of those who hold a position as official elders, and the spirit in which any charges of evil against such are to be met.

(Vv. 17, 18). The work of the elders was to take the lead in the assemblies of God's people (N.T.). They are responsible to see that godly order is maintained in public and private. Honour was due to an elder as such; those who did their work well were to be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who, besides caring for the saints, laboured in word and teaching. Moreover, their temporal needs were not to be forgotten. Both the Old Testament and the New are quoted, as having equal authority as Scripture, to press our responsibility to help the labourer (Deuteronomy 25: 4; Luke 10: 7).

(V. 19). The elder, by reason of his service, would be more liable than others to misunderstanding and detraction. His having at times to deal with faults in others could lead to resentment and ill-feeling which might manifest itself in malicious accusation. There might, indeed, be just cause for an accusation, but it was not to be received apart from witnesses.

(Vv. 20, 21). Offenders, whether elders or not, whose faults have been fully proved by adequate witnesses, are to be rebuked before all that others may fear. Nevertheless, everything in the way of rebuke is to be done, not simply before others, but “before God” whose house we are, before the Lord Jesus Christ, who is Son over God's house, and before the elect angels who are ministers of those who form the house. Thus the rebuke would be without “prejudice” that would form a judgment without

duly considering the whole matter, and without partiality that would prefer one before another.

(d) Care in the expression of fellowship (verse 22)

(V. 22). In Scripture to lay hands on another is the sign of fellowship, rather than the communication of authority as Christendom teaches. False liberality may affect large-heartedness by carelessly extending fellowship to those who are pursuing a wrong course. We may thus put our sanction on evil and partake of other men's sins. We are to keep ourselves pure, an injunction that clearly proves we may be defiled by our associations.

(e) Instruction as to bodily needs (verse 23)

(V. 23). The needs of a weak and suffering body are not to be neglected. Timothy was to “use a little wine” on account of his stomach and “frequent illnesses”. Timothy is not blamed for his illnesses, nor is it suggested that their frequent occurrence proves any lack of faith on his part; nor is he exhorted to seek that elders should lay hands on him or even pray for his healing. He is bidden to use an ordinary remedy. Nevertheless, it is “a little wine” and to be used for the sake of a weak stomach. Thus there is no excuse, in the apostle's advice, for taking an excess of wine or using it for mere self-indulgence.

(f) Warning against judging by appearances (verses 24, 25)

(V. 24). In judging of our associations with others we have to guard against being deceived by appearances. The sins of some are so open that there can be no question as to their character and condemnation. Others may be equally evil and yet deceive by a fair show in the flesh. Nevertheless, their sins will pursue them to judgment.

(V. 25). This may be true of those in whom grace has wrought. With some it is obvious that their good works proclaim their true character. Others may be equally the subjects of grace and yet their works may be less public. In due time all will come to light.

As we read the apostle's instructions and warnings we may well take heed to the word, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10: 12). From the exhortations of the chapter it is evident that the believer can fall into a condition in which he lies in habits of self-indulgence (verse 6); he can act in a way that is worse than an unbeliever and thus deny the faith (verse 8); can wax wanton against Christ and thus cast off the first faith (verse 11); can become an idle wanderer from house to house, gossiping and meddling in the affairs of others (verse 13); and can turn aside after Satan (verse 15).

Moreover, as we read the instructions, we learn that those who compose the house of God should seek to live in a way that is good and acceptable before God (verse 4); blameless before men (verse 7); giving no occasion for reproach (verse 14).

6 Warnings against Pride of the Flesh and Instruction in Piety

(1 Timothy 6)

The apostle has warned us against religious flesh that apostatises from the truth and adopts asceticism (1 Timothy 4); and against worldly flesh, leading to wantonness and self-indulgence (1

Timothy 5); now, in the closing chapter, we are warned against the pride of the flesh that covets money and worldly advantage. To meet these evils the apostle again presses upon us practical piety (verses 3, 5, 6, 11).

In the course of his exhortation the apostle brings before us the Christian slave (verses 1, 2); the proud and ignorant professor of Christianity (verses 3-8); the backslider, enticed by the riches of the world (verses 9, 10); the man of God (verses 11, 12); Christ, the perfect Example (verses 13-16); the believer who is rich in this world (verses 17-19); and the professed scientist (verses 20, 21).

(a) Christian slaves (verses 1, 2)

(V. 1). The chapter fitly opens with instruction for the Christian slave. Such might attempt to use Christianity as a means of improving his social position. The institution of slavery may, indeed, be entirely contrary to the spirit of Christianity. Nevertheless, the great object of the house of God is not to set the world right, nor to advance the worldly interests of those who form the house, but to maintain the glory of the Name of God and to witness to, and support, the truth. The Christian slave, then, was to show all honour to his unbelieving master, that there might be nothing in his conduct that could justly cast a slur upon the Name of the One who dwells in the house, or that would deny the truth that the house of God is to maintain.

(V. 2). The apostle gives a special warning to the Christian slave with a believing master. The fact that his master was a brother in the Lord was not to be used to set aside the respect that was due from a servant to a master. Any lack in this proper respect would be an attempt on the part of the slave to use Christianity to raise his social position, thus seeking his own worldly advantage.

In the assembly the slave and the master were on common ground, equal before the Lord. There, indeed, the slave might by reason of his spirituality, or gift, be more prominent than his earthly master. Let believing slaves, however, beware lest they are tempted to abuse the privileges of the assembly by making them a ground for undue familiarity to their masters in the every-day affairs of life. So far from growing slack in their duties to masters who were believers, they were rather to render them service because they were faithful and beloved and partakers of Christian benefits.

(b) The ignorant professor, destitute of the truth (verses 3-8)

(V. 3). Clearly, then, Christianity is not a system for the advancement of our social position in this world. It is true that the believer, as he passes through this world, is to do good, and that the presence of the Christian and right Christian conduct must have a beneficial effect. Nevertheless, the great object of the house of God is not to improve the world, but to witness to the grace of God in order that men may be saved out of the world which, in spite of civilisation and any social improvements, is going on to judgment.

Apparently, in those early days there were those who taught otherwise. They viewed Christianity merely as a means for improving the social conditions of men and women, thus making this world a better and a brighter place. Probably they were teaching that the converted slave, having come under the Lordship of Christ, could consider himself free from his earthly master. Such views, however, were contrary to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the teaching which is according to piety.

Thus, again, the apostle brings in piety as the safeguard against the abuse of our Christian privileges. Piety walks in the fear of God, trusting in the living God, who is the Preserver of all men.

Thus walking we should be preserved from seeking to use Christianity simply as a means of improving our worldly position.

(Vv. 4, 5). Having shown that piety is the safeguard against the abuse of Christianity, the apostle states that the one who teaches otherwise is moved by the pride of the flesh. Pride that trusts in self, and seeks to maintain one's self-importance, is utterly opposed to piety that trusts in God and seeks His glory.

Behind this pride there is ignorance of the mind of the Lord as conveyed in His words. This ignorance of the Lord's mind arises from allowing the human mind to be occupied with the endless questions raised by men and strifes about words. Wholly indifferent to the moral power of the Christian faith working in the soul and leading to the life of piety, men treat Christianity as if it were a matter of "questions and disputes of words".

Such disputes of words, instead of strengthening piety, only give occasion for the manifestation of the works of the flesh. The pride that seeks to exalt self by these endless questions must inevitably lead to "envy", for the proud man can brook no rival. Naturally the flesh will strive against the one of whom it is envious. Thus envy leads to strife, and striving against another will lead to "injurious words" about him. The knowledge that "injurious words" are being uttered will raise "evil suspicions" and "constant quarrellings". Such is the evil crop that arises from envy. There is no greater power for evil among the saints of God than the allowance of envy in the heart. "Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but", says the preacher, "who is able to stand before envy?" It was envy that led to the first murder in this world; and it was envy that led to the greatest murder in this world. Pilate "knew that *for envy* they had delivered Him" (Matthew 27: 18).

Alas! this envy may show itself among the true people of the Lord. Here the apostle traces it back to the pride of a heart that is corrupt and destitute of the truth of Christianity. The underlying motive with such is earthly gain; hence they hold that "gain" is the end of piety. In other words, they teach that Christianity is merely a means of improving our condition and adding to our worldly advantage. This we know, from the history of Job, is really a suggestion of the devil. Job was a pious man and one that feared God, but, says Satan, "Doth Job fear God for nought?" Satan's vile suggestion is that no such thing as godliness exists, and that if a man makes a profession of piety, it is not that he fears God, or cares for God, but simply that he knows it pays and is to his worldly advantage. Satan says to God, "Put forth Thy hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse Thee to Thy face." The Lord allows this horrible lie of the devil to be thoroughly exposed. Satan is allowed to strip Job of all that he has, and, in result, Satan is exposed as a liar. Instead of cursing God, Job fell down before the LORD and worshipped, saying, "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the LORD" (Job. 1: 8-12, 20, 21).

(Vv. 6-8). Thus the truth, as well as the experience of the people of God, proves not only that piety is gain but, when accompanied with contentment that trusts God, it is *great gain*. We brought nothing into the world, and whatever possessions we may acquire as we pass through the world, it is evident that we can carry nothing out. Having food and covering — and the slave had these things — let us therewith be content.

(c) The backslider enticed by the riches of the world (verses 9, 10)

In contrast with godly contentment there is the restlessness of those who desire to be rich. Wealth has its snares as the apostle shows a little later, but it is not necessarily the possession of wealth that ruins the soul, but the "desire to be rich" (N.T.). It has been pointed out that this word "desire" includes

the idea of purpose. The danger is that the believer, instead of being content to earn his living, may set himself with “purpose” of heart to be rich. Thus riches become an object instead of the Lord. Better for us to cleave to the Lord “with purpose of heart” (Acts 11: 23).

The apostle warns us against the evils that result from the desire to gain riches. All are tempted, but the one that desires to be rich will fall into the temptation and find himself caught in some hidden snare of the enemy. Moreover, the desire to be rich opens the way to foolish and hurtful lusts, for it panders to the vanity and pride of the flesh, ministering to selfishness and ambition. These are the things that plunge men into destruction and ruin. Thus it is not simply money, but “the love of money” that is the root of every evil. How solemn that it is possible for the believer to be drawn into the very things that bring destruction and ruin upon the men of the world. Even in the days of the apostle some had coveted after riches, only to wander from the faith and pierce themselves through with many sorrows.

(d) The man of God (verses 11, 12)

(V. 11). In contrast with the backslider that wanders from the faith, the apostle sets before us the characteristics of the “man of God”. In the New Testament the expression “man of God” only occurs in the Epistles to Timothy. Here it is definitely applied to Timothy; in the Second Epistle it is applied to all who, in an evil day, walk in faithful obedience to the word of God (2 Timothy 3: 17). There are things from which the man of God has to “flee”; things that he is exhorted to “follow”; things for which he is called to “fight”; there is something to “lay hold” of; and something to be “confessed”.

The man of God will *flee* from the foolish and hurtful lusts of which the apostle has been speaking. It is not enough, however, to avoid evil; there must be the pursuit of good. Therefore the man of God is to *follow* after “righteousness, piety, faith, love, endurance, meekness of spirit” (N.T.). However others may act, the man of God will seek to walk in consistency with his relationships to others as brethren; this is righteousness. But this righteousness to others is taken up in the holy fear that realises our relationships to God, and what is due to God; this is piety. Further, the man of God will pursue faith that has Christ for its Object, and “love” that goes out to his brethren, bearing evil and insults with quiet endurance and meekness, instead of impatience and resentment.

(V. 12). Further, the man of God will not be content with fleeing from evil and following certain great moral qualities. These things are, indeed, of the first importance, but the man of God is not content with the formation of a beautiful character individually, while indifferent to the maintenance of the truth of Christianity. He realises that the great truths of Christianity will meet with unceasing and deadly opposition of the devil and he will not shrink from the conflict for the faith.

Moreover, in contending for the faith, the man of God will not forget the eternal life which, though he possesses, in all its fulness, lies before him. He is to lay hold of it in present enjoyment as his sustaining hope.

Lastly, if the man of God flees from evil, follows good, fights for the faith and lays hold of eternal life, he will be one who in his life makes a good confession before others. He becomes a living witness to the truths that he professes.

(e) The perfect Example (verses 13-16)

To encourage us to keep this charge, the apostle reminds us that we live in the sight of One who preserves all things in life (N.T.). Can He not then preserve His own, however severe the conflict they

may have to pass through? Moreover, if we are called to faithfulness, let us not forget we are under the eye of One who has been before us in the conflict, and who, in the presence of the contradiction of sinners, of envy and insult, acted in absolute faithfulness to God, maintaining the truth in patience and meekness, and thus witnessed a good confession.

Moreover, faithfulness will have its reward. The commandment is, therefore, to be kept spotless and irreproachable, until the appearing of Jesus Christ. The glory of His appearing will bring with it an answer to any little faithfulness on our part, as, indeed, it will be the glorious answer to the perfect faithfulness of Christ. Then, indeed, when the One man reviled, insulted and crucified is displayed in glory, there will be not only a full answer to all His faithfulness, but a full display of all that God is. It will be manifest to all the world what is already revealed to faith, that, in the Person of Christ, God is revealed as the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, the One who, in the majesty of His Deity, alone has essential immortality, and who dwells in inaccessible light.

Those who form the house of God may fail to witness for God; the man of God may only display God in measure, but in Christ there will be the full display of God for His everlasting glory.

(f) The rich in this world (verses 17-19)

The apostle has a special exhortation for believers who are rich in this world. Such are beset by two dangers. Firstly, there is the tendency of riches to lead the possessors to assume an air of highmindedness, thinking themselves to be superior to others because of their riches. Secondly, there is the natural tendency to trust in the riches that at best are uncertain.

The safeguard against these snares is found in trusting in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy. However rich a man may be, he cannot buy the things that God *gives*. However poor, he can receive and enjoy what God gives.

Trusting in the living God, who is the Giver of all good, will enable the rich man also to become a giver. But God loves a cheerful giver; hence the rich man is exhorted to be “ready to distribute” and “willing to communicate”. Thus acting he will be laying by a good store in view of future blessing, instead of laying up riches for this present age. The man who lays up for the time to come will lay hold of that which is really life, in contrast with the life of pleasure and self-indulgence that earthly riches might secure.

(g) The professed scientist (verses 20, 21)

Finally, we are warned to keep “the entrusted deposit”. The whole truth of Christianity has been given to the saints as a “trust” to be held in the face of every opposition. Here we are specially warned against the opposition of the theories of men, which prove to be utterly false by subjecting God, His creation and His revelation to the mind of man, instead of being subject to God and His world. Presumptuously occupied with their infidel theories they have missed the faith.