

The Second 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 First Epistle to Timothy presents the church of God as the house of God and prescribes its divine order according to the mind of God. It recognises that there were, even then, individuals who had turned aside unto vain jangling, desiring to be teachers of the law, and that there were some who had made shipwreck of the faith. Warnings are also given that in the latter times some will apostatise from the faith. Nevertheless, the mass of Christians are viewed as desiring to answer to their responsibilities in maintaining the order of the house of God, and the great aim of the Spirit in the Epistle is to give instructions as to that order and the behaviour consistent with it in all the details of its administration on earth.

In the Second Epistle to Timothy all is changed. The church, as the house of God, is no longer seen as maintained in order according to God, but as having fallen into disorder through the failure of man. In view of this failure and disorder the apostle Paul writes to Timothy to encourage, instruct and exhort him in a day of ruin, and, further, to warn him that the evil would continue and increase throughout the dispensation, manifesting itself in its worst forms in the last days.

Thus in the course of the Epistle we learn that already in the apostle's day the gospel was in affliction, the preacher to the Gentiles was in prison, and the saints had deserted the one who had made known to them the full truth of Christianity (2 Timothy 1). False teachers were arising in the Christian profession who, by profane and vain babblings, were teaching errors that would lead to ungodliness, so that, in result, the house of God would become like a great house in which there were vessels to honour associated with vessels to dishonour (2 Timothy 2). Moreover, if such was the condition that had its commencement in that day, a worse condition would follow. In the last days difficult times would come when the mass of professing Christians would be marked by the form of piety without its power. In such a condition evil men would wax worse and worse until at last the Christian profession would no longer endure sound doctrine. Thus in the First Epistle the mass are still viewed as faithful, though individuals may fail: in the Second Epistle the mass have failed, and only individuals remain true to

their profession (2 Timothy 3 and 2 Timothy 4).

Furthermore, the Epistle shows that at the time when the storm of evil was rising, the very one who had so often defeated the enemy and guided the saints was about to be removed. Thus it might appear that the apostle was to be taken at the very moment when his presence was most needed.

Nevertheless, this combination of circumstances — the rising storm of evil and the removal of one so suited to meet it — is used by the Spirit of God to prove to the faithful throughout the Christian period that, apart from all human agency, God is equal to every emergency they may be called to face.

Though about to depart, and looking forward with confidence to the crown of righteousness in the day of the Lord, the apostle could not but feel deeply the failure of that which under God he had been used to establish on earth. All this sorrow of heart he pours into the ear of his beloved child in the faith. This unburdening of the heart of the apostle to Timothy is used by the Spirit of God, on the one hand to forewarn believers of the progressive character of the corruption of Christendom throughout the dispensation, and on the other hand to set before us the greatness of our resources in God, in Christ and in the Scriptures, in order that we may be sustained in the midst of the evil and walk according to the mind of God in difficult times.

The instruction of the Epistle is presented in the following order:

Firstly, in 2 Timothy 1, the abiding consolations of the godly in a day of ruin;

Secondly, in 2 Timothy 2, the path of the godly in a day of ruin;

Thirdly, in 2 Timothy 3, the resources of the godly in the last days;

Fourthly, in 2 Timothy 4, the special directions for the service of God in the day when the mass of the Christian profession will no longer endure sound doctrine.

2 The Consolations of the Godly in a Day of Ruin

(2 Timothy 1)

The Spirit of God is about to set before us the ruin of the house of God and the increasing failure of the Christian profession throughout the dispensation with its culmination of evil in the last days. Such a terrible picture of the hopeless breakdown of Christendom may well dismay the stoutest heart. The apostle, therefore, before delineating the ruin, seeks to establish our souls and strengthen our confidence in God by setting before us our abiding resources in God. In this first chapter there pass before us the life which is in Christ Jesus (verse 1); the things which God has given to us (verses 6, 7); the testimony of our Lord (verse 8); the salvation and calling of God (verses 9, 10); the day of glory, referred to as “that day” (verses 12, 18); and the sound words of truth that no error can affect (verse 13).

(V. 1). Paul opens the Epistle by presenting his credentials. He writes with all authority as “apostle of Jesus Christ”. Good for us then to read the Epistle as bringing a message to us from Jesus Christ by His sent one. Paul’s apostleship is not by the ordination or will of man, but “by the will of God”. Moreover, Paul was sent by Jesus Christ to serve in this world of death having in view the fulfilment of the promise of life, the life which is seen in all its fulness in Christ Jesus in glory. As so often with the apostle Paul, “life” is viewed in its fulness in glory, and, in this sense, can be referred to as a promise. No ruin of the church can touch this life that is in Christ Jesus and that belongs to every

believer.

(Vv. 2-5). The apostle can address Timothy as his “beloved child”. What a comfort that in a day of ruin there are those to whom we can unreservedly express our affection, and to whom in all confidence we can unburden our hearts. Two leading characteristics in Timothy drew forth the love and confidence of Paul. Firstly, he was mindful of his tears; secondly, he remembered his unfeigned faith. The tears of Timothy proved that he was a man of spiritual depth and affection who felt the low and broken condition of the Christian profession; his unfeigned faith proved that he was able to rise above all the evil in obedience to, and with confidence in, God.

Timothy may indeed have been of a timid nature and in danger of being overwhelmed by the evil that was coming into the church; as he was marked by tears and faith, the apostle was encouraged to instruct and exhort him, knowing that he had qualities which would enable him to answer to his appeal. Nor is it otherwise today. The instructions of this touching Epistle will find little response unless there are the tears that tell of a tender heart that can mourn over the sorrows of God's people, and the faith that can take God's path of separation in the midst of the ruin.

Paul delighted to remember in his prayers this man of tears and faith. What a cheer to any saint, broken hearted by the condition of God's people, to know that there are devoted and faithful saints by whom he is remembered in prayer. Faithfulness in a day of desertion binds hearts together in the bonds of divine love.

(V. 6). Having expressed his love for and confidence in Timothy, the apostle passes on to exhortation, encouragement and instruction. Firstly, he exhorts him to stir up “the gift of God” which had been imparted to him for the service of the Lord. In his case it had been bestowed through the apostle. In the presence of difficulties, dangers and general unfaithfulness, when there would appear to be little result from the ministry, there is the danger of thinking it is almost useless to exercise gift. Therefore we need the warning against letting the gift fall into disuse. We are to stir it up; and, in a day of ruin, to be all the more insistent in its use. A little later the apostle can say, “Proclaim the word; be urgent in season and out of season” (2 Timothy 4: 2).

(V. 7). Having spoken of gifts that are special to the individual, the apostle passes on to remind Timothy of the gift that is common to all believers. To some, God gives a special gift for the ministry of the word; to all His people He gives the spirit of power, and of love, and of wise discretion. It would hardly seem that the reference is to the Holy Spirit, though the gift of the Spirit is implied. It is rather the state and spirit of the believer that is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit and therefore partakes of the character of the Spirit, as the Lord said, “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” By nature Timothy may have been timid and retiring in disposition, but the Holy Spirit does not produce the spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. In the natural man we may find power without love, or love degenerating into mere sentiment. With the Christian, under the control of the Spirit, power is combined with love, and love expressed with a wise discretion.

Thus, however difficult the day, the believer is well equipped with power to do the will of God, to express the love of God, and to exercise a sober judgment in the midst of the ruin.

(V. 8). Having reminded us of the spirit of holy boldness that has been given to us, the apostle can at once say, “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner.” The testimony of our Lord is the testimony to the glory of Christ set as Man in supreme power after having triumphed over all the power of Satan. Peter was not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, for he boldly testified, saying, “Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2: 36). As one has said, “After the devil

has led man on to do his utmost against Christ, lo, Jesus is crowned with glory and honour after all. Now that surely is victory!”

So, in this day, when ruin has come in amongst the people of God, when the triumph of Satan is such that Paul is in prison, the saints have deserted him and evil is increasing, the apostle, though deeply feeling all the failure, is sustained through it all and lifted above it all by the realisation that the Lord Jesus is in the supreme place of power above every influence of Satan. The Lord in glory is his resource. He therefore says, “*The Lord* stood with me, and strengthened me ... *The Lord* shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom” (2 Timothy 4: 17, 18).

We rightly speak much of Christ in His earthly pathway, of Christ on the cross, and of Christ coming again, but how rarely we speak of Christ where He is at the present moment in the glory of God, and yet this is *the testimony of the Lord* — the great testimony that is needed for the moment, the testimony of which we are warned not to be ashamed.

However great the ruin, whatever the failure amongst God's people, whatever difficulties we may have to meet, whatever the desertion of the saints (2 Timothy 1: 15), the self-will of those who oppose themselves (2 Timothy 2: 25, 26), or the malice of those who may seek to do us evil (2 Timothy 4: 14), our unfailing resource is to be found in the Lord Jesus at God's right hand. Looking to Him we shall, like the apostle, be lifted above all the failure whether in ourselves or others. Alas! in our difficulties we may make matters worse by seeking to put them right in our own strength, whereas if we turned to the Lord we should find, even as Paul, that the Lord is with us to strengthen us and to deliver from every evil work.

How necessary then that we should render a clear testimony to the present position of the Lord in the place of supremacy and power as a Man in the glory, in whom is every resource to sustain us in the darkest days.

Moreover, let us beware of being ashamed of those who, in a day of departure, boldly seek to give the Lord His place; and let us be prepared to suffer evil, if need be, in the maintenance of the gospel, knowing that we can count upon the power of God to support us.

(Vv. 9, 10). Having warned us not to be ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, nor of the one who witnesses to His supreme place as Lord and suffers reproach for his witness, and having encouraged us to share in the afflictions of the gospel, the apostle proceeds to remind us of the greatness of that gospel, which is the power of God to them that are saved and called (1 Corinthians 1: 18, 24). The realisation of the glory of the Lord and the greatness of the gospel will keep us from being ashamed of the testimony and prepare us to suffer affliction with the gospel.

It becomes clear from these verse that the two great themes of the gospel are salvation and calling. On the one hand the gospel proclaims the way of salvation; on the other hand it presents to us the purpose of God for which we are saved. We are apt to limit the gospel to the important question of our salvation, but so doing we miss the far deeper blessing connected with God's eternal purpose, and thus fail to enter into the heavenly calling. It is plain that the first great object of the gospel is our salvation, and God would have the believer to be in no uncertainty as to this salvation, as we read in this Scripture, He “hath saved us.” The blessed effect of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is to set the believer beyond the judgment due to him on account of his sins, and to deliver him from the course of this world. So we read, He “gave Himself for our sins, so that He should deliver us out of the present evil world” (Galatians 1: 4). Though for the time we are actually in the world, we are, as set free from its power and influence, morally not of it.

This is the first part of the gospel, and with this the mass of God's people would seek to be content. Nevertheless, the gospel proclaims far greater blessings, for it tells us of the calling of God. Not only has God saved us, but we read He has “called us with an holy calling.” In this passage the calling is referred to as “an holy calling”; it is also spoken of as “the heavenly calling” (Hebrews 3: 1) and “the calling on high” (Philippians 3: 14). Salvation sets us free from our sins and the judgment-doomed world: the calling links us with heaven and all those spiritual blessings which God has purposed for us in the heavenlies in Christ. Therefore the blessings of God's calling are “not according to our works”, nor our thoughts, nor our deserts, but “according to His own purpose and grace”.

It is not only that all our debts have been paid, and that we have been delivered from the influence and power of the scene in which the debts were incurred, but we learn to our wonder that according to the purpose of God there are things prepared for those who love Him which “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man” (1 Corinthians 2: 9). In the calling of God there is revealed to us the secret of His heart as He unrolls before us a vast vista of heavenly blessing, and assures us that all this blessing was purposed for us in Christ before the foundation of the world. We thus learn that long before we had sinned, or incurred a single liability, God had a settled purpose for our eternal blessing. No evil that we have done, no break down in the church in responsibility, can alter God's purpose, even as no good that we can do can procure it.

This eternal purpose has now been made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath annulled death, and brought life and incorruptibility to light through the gospel. By going into death Christ has, for the believer, met the judgment of death that rested upon us, and opened up to us a new scene of life and incorruptibility. Death can no longer prevent the believer entering in to this scene of life and blessedness according to the purpose of God. It is not only that the soul passes from death unto life, but the body will put on incorruption. Thus, by the gospel, there is brought to light a sphere of life and incorruptibility which nevermore can be marred by death or corruption. In the power of the Spirit this new scene can be enjoyed even now.

(V. 11). Furthermore, this gospel in all its fulness has been made known to us by a specially appointed vessel — one who comes to us as apostle of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. It comes therefore on adequate authority through an apostle who speaks by revelation and inspiration.

(V. 12). Moreover, it was because of his faithful testimony that Paul had to suffer. It was no wrongdoing that brought him into suffering and reproach. His zeal as a herald, his devotedness as an apostle sent by Christ, his faithfulness to the church as a teacher, enabled him to say, “For which cause I also suffer these things.” Imprisonment was only one of “these things” that this faithful servant had to suffer. There were other sufferings more keenly felt by his sensitive heart, for “these things” included the desertion of those he loved in Asia and amongst whom he had laboured so long. Then, too, he suffered from the opposition of professors who opposed the truth (2 Timothy 2: 25), from the persecution of evil men (2 Timothy 3: 11-13), and the active malice of individual professors who, like Alexander, did the apostle much evil (2 Timothy 4: 14). Nevertheless, seeing he was suffering for his faithfulness as a servant of Jesus Christ, he can say, “I am not ashamed.” Further, not only was he not ashamed, but he was not cast down, nor does one word of resentful anger escape his lips because of the unrighteousness of the world, and the desertion, ingratitude, and even opposition, on the part of many Christians. He is lifted above all depression, all resentment and all rancour, inasmuch as he is persuaded that Christ is able to keep that which he has committed unto Him against that day. When Christ was reviled He reviled not again, when He suffered He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously. In the spirit of his Master, Paul, in the presence of suffering, desertion and insults, commits everything into the hands of Christ. His honour, his reputation, his character, his

vindication, his happiness, all are committed to Christ, knowing that, though the saints may desert and even oppose him, yet Christ will never fail him. He is persuaded that Christ is able to care for his interests, vindicate his honour and right every wrong in “that day”.

In the light of “that day” Paul can pass triumphantly through “this day” with all its insults, scorn and shame. We may wonder why the devoted apostle was allowed to be deserted and opposed even by the saints; but we shall not wonder in “that day” when every wrong will be righted, and when all the shame and suffering and reproach will be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. The faithful in this day may indeed be a small and insignificant minority, even as the apostle Paul and the few who were associated with him at the close of his life; nevertheless, in “that day” it will be found to be far better to have been with the despised few than with the unfaithful mass.

The vanity of the flesh likes to be popular and self-important and make itself prominent before the world and the saints, but in view of that day it is better to take a lowly place in self-effacement rather than a public place in self-advertisement, for then it will be found that many that are first shall be last; and the last first.

We may indeed suffer for our own failure, and this should humble us. Nevertheless, with the example of the apostle before us, we do well to remember that, had we walked in absolute faithfulness, we should have suffered still more, for it ever remains true that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3: 12). If we are faithful to the light that God has given us, and seek to walk in separation from all that is a denial of the truth, we shall find, in our little measure, that we shall have to face persecution and opposition, and, in its most painful forms, from our fellow-Christians. And well for us, when the trial comes, if we can, like Paul, commit all to the Lord, and wait for His vindication in that day. Too often we are fretful and impatient in the presence of wrongs, and seek to have them righted in *this day* instead of waiting for “that day”. If, in the faith of our souls, the glory of that day shines before us, instead of being tempted to rebel at the insults and wrongs that may be allowed, we shall “rejoice and be exceeding glad: for”, says the Lord, “great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 5: 12).

(Vv. 13, 14). Seeing, then, that this great gospel, with its salvation and calling, comes to Timothy through an inspired source, he is exhorted to “have an outline of sound words”, which he had heard of the apostle. The truths communicated to Timothy in “sound words” were to be held by him in an orderly form, or outline, so that he could state clearly and definitely what he did hold. Having this outline, the truths conveyed by the “sound words” would be seen in right relation to one another. For us this outline is found in the written word, and very especially in the Epistles of Paul. Thus, in the Epistle to the Romans, there is an orderly presentation of the truths concerning our salvation, while his other Epistles give an outline concerning the church, the coming of the Lord, and other truths. In Christendom this outline has been largely lost through the use of isolated texts apart from their context. This outline, as presented in Scripture, is to be jealously guarded. Sincere men may seek to formulate their belief in religious confessions, articles of religion, and theological creeds. Such human expedients, whatever use they may have in their place, ever fall short of *the truth* and cannot take the place of the inspired outline presented in Scripture.

Moreover, this outline of sound words received from the apostle is to be held, not as a mere creed to which we can give our assent, but in faith and love in Christ Jesus, the living Person of whom the truth speaks. It is not enough to have an outline of sound words. If the truth is to be effectual in our lives it must be held “in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus”. The truth that, when first presented to the soul, is received with joy will lose its freshness unless held in communion with the Lord.

Moreover, if the truth is to be held in communion with Christ, it can only be in the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore the whole range of truth contained in the outline of sound words which had been given to Timothy was to be kept by the Holy Ghost which dwells in us.

(V. 15). The immense importance of holding the outline of the truth in communion with Christ by the power of the Spirit is emphasised by the solemn fact that the one by whom the truth had been revealed was deserted by the main body of saints in Asia. The very saints to whom the heavenly calling and the whole range of Christian truth had been revealed had turned from Paul. It is not that these saints had turned from Christ, or given up the gospel of their salvation, but the truth of the heavenly calling unfolded by the apostle had not been held in communion with Christ and in the power of the Spirit. Hence they were not prepared to be associated with him in the outside place of rejection in this world that the full truth of Christianity involves.

It is evident, then, that we cannot trust the most enlightened saints for the maintenance of the truth. It is only as Christ commands the affections in the power of the Spirit that we shall keep that good thing which has been committed unto us.

(Vv. 16-18). The reference to Onesiphorus and his household is very touching. It proves that the indifference and the desertion of the mass did not lead the apostle to overlook the love and kindness of an individual and his family. Indeed, the desertion of the mass made the affection of the few all the more precious. When the great mass grieved the heart of Paul, there was at least one of whom he can say, "He oft refreshed me." Others may be ashamed of him, but of this brother he can say that he "was not ashamed of my chain." When others deserted him, there was still one of whom he can write, "He sought me out very diligently, and found me." When others neglected him he can own with pleasure of this brother that "in many things he ministered unto me."

How gratifying it must have been to the heart of the apostle, in the day of his desertion, to realise the sympathy and consolations of Christ finding their expression through this devoted brother. If Paul does not forget this expression of love in the day of his desertion, the Lord will not forget it "in that day" — the day of the coming glory.

3 The Path of the Godly in a Day of Ruin

(2 Timothy 2)

The believer, instructed in the mind of God, cannot but admit that what passes for the church of God before men has no resemblance to the church of God as presented in Scripture. This grave departure from the Word of God clearly shows that God's intention for the church, during its sojourn in a world from which Christ is absent, has been ruined in the hands of man. Few, indeed, would deny that we live in a day of ruin. It is, however, of the first importance to understand clearly what we mean when we speak of the ruin of the church.

We must remember that in Scripture the church is viewed in two ways. On the one hand, it is presented according to the counsels of God; on the other hand, it is viewed in connection with the responsibility of man. In the first aspect it is presented in Scripture as founded upon Christ the Son of God, composed of all true believers, and destined to be presented to Christ a glorious church without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. As such, it is the result of Christ's own work, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. No ruin can touch Christ's work, nor set aside God's eternal counsels for Christ and the church.

In the second aspect, the church is viewed as set in responsibility to witness for Christ during the time of His absence, and to present the grace of God to a needy world. Alas! the church has entirely failed in carrying out this responsibility. Through lack of dependence upon the Lord, submission to the Spirit, and obedience to the Word, the people of God have become divided and scattered; and lack of watchfulness has ended in a vast profession embracing believers and unbelievers. In result, that which passes before the world as the church, so far from representing the glory of Christ, is “a denial of the nature, the love, the holiness, and the affections of Christ.” Thus on earth the testimony of the church has been ruined. The fact that we have to speak of a professing church which is visible, and a spiritual church composed of all true believers which is invisible, only shows how complete is the ruin.

If, then, we speak of living in a day of ruin, we mean that our lot is cast in a day when the church's witness to an absent Christ has been ruined. In the addresses to the seven churches in The Revelation we have a prophetic outline of the church's history on earth, viewed as the responsible witness for Christ; and therein we have the church's progressive failure in responsibility foretold with divine accuracy by the Lord Himself, beginning with its departure from first love, and ending with a condition so nauseous to Christ that it will finally be spued out of His mouth.

Scripture, however, gives further light as to a day of ruin. In this Second Epistle to Timothy, we not only have the prediction of the ruin, but the Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, gives very definite directions to the godly how to act when the ruin has come in. However dark the day, however great the ruin, the people of God are not left without divine guidance. The mercy of God has marked out a path for His people in a day of ruin. We may lack the faith in God and the devotedness to Christ that are necessary to take the path; none the less it is marked out in the word of God for the obedience of faith.

Thus we reach the conclusion that two things are necessary in order to take God's path intelligently in the midst of the ruin. Firstly, it is essential that we have some knowledge of Paul's doctrine (which includes the truth of the gospel as well as the truth of the church); secondly, there must be a right spiritual condition. Without some knowledge of the church, as presented in Scripture, it would be impossible to appreciate the extent of the ruin; and without a right spiritual condition, the believer would hardly be prepared to take the path that God has marked out in the midst of the ruin.

Paul evidently assumes that the one to whom he writes is well acquainted with his doctrine. In the first and second chapters he refers to the things which Timothy had heard of him (2 Timothy 1: 13; 2 Timothy 2: 2); and in the third chapter he says, “Thou hast fully known my doctrine.” There is therefore no doctrinal unfolding of the truth of the church in this Second Epistle. Such truth is fully presented by the apostle in the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians, the First Epistle to the Corinthians and the First Epistle to Timothy.

The path of God for us in a day of ruin, and the spiritual condition needed to take the path, are unfolded in this second chapter of the Second Epistle to Timothy. If we desire to answer to God's mind in this day of failure we shall do well to study prayerfully this important passage. The truths of this chapter may be viewed in the following order:

(a) The spiritual condition necessary to discern and take God's path for us amidst the failure of Christendom (verses 1-13);

(b) A brief outline of the course of the evil that has led to the corruption of Christendom (verses 14-18);

(c) The resource of the godly and the path of God for the individual in the midst of the ruin

(verses 19-22);

(d) The spirit in which to meet those who raise opposition to God's path (verses 23-26).

(a) The needed spiritual condition for God's path in a day of ruin (verses 1-13)

(V. 1). Spiritual grace is the first great necessity in a day of weakness. Hence the exhortation of the opening verse is to “be strong in *the* grace that is in Christ Jesus.” To stand against the rising tide of evil, to step into a path that the Lord has marked out for His own in the midst of the corruptions of Christendom, and to continue steadfastly walking in this path in spite of failure, opposition and desertion, calls for great grace — the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Whatever opposition there may be to God's path, whatever difficulties in persevering in it, whatever temptations to turn from it, the grace of the Lord is sufficient to enable the believer to overcome all opposition, rise above every difficulty, resist all temptation, and to obey His word and answer to His mind. As one has said, “Whatever the want, His fulness is the same, undiminished, accessible and free.” Spiritual grace is the first requisite for “faithful men” in a day of unfaithfulness. Further, the grace of which the apostle speaks is more than a “gracious spirit”. It implies that in the risen and ascended Christ, from the time of the church's inception on earth to the last day of its stay here, there is every resource to enable the man of God to maintain his life of testimony and service without resorting to any of the expedients of man that so many have adopted in a day of declension. Writing to the Corinthians, the apostle can thank God for “the *grace* of God” given to them “in Christ Jesus”; and at once he shows that this grace is the “word of doctrine”, the “knowledge” and the “gifts” with which they had been enriched in Christ (1 Corinthians 1: 4-7). Every exhortation in the chapter will only deepen our sense of the need of the grace that is in Christ Jesus if we are to answer to the mind of God.

(V. 2). Secondly, not only is grace needed, but the faithful must also possess the truth if they are to be furnished with the mind of God for a day of failure and fitted to instruct others. Further, the truth needed for a day of ruin is not only the truth found in Scripture as a whole, but, very specially, the truth as communicated by the apostle in the presence of many witnesses. In a day of ruin, apostolic writings become a very definite test whereby to discern “faithful men”. “We are of God: he that knoweth God *heareth us*; he that is not of God *heareth not us*”, says the apostle John (1 John 4: 6).

In order, then, that through all time we may possess the truth, Timothy is instructed to commit “the things” heard from the apostle to faithful men, who, in their turn, will be able to instruct others. It is God's way that the truth enshrined in apostolic writings should be committed to those able to teach others. The self-sufficiency and self-importance of the flesh may flatter itself that it can dispense with the help of others; but, while God is sovereign and can teach directly from His word, His usual way is to keep us mutually dependent upon one another — to receive as learners, and to communicate to others the truth and light which we have received.

Moreover, it is important to see that what we pass on is not official authority, or official position, but *the truth*. Timothy had neither commission nor power to pass on to any individual, or class of individuals, the exclusive or official right to preach. It was the revealed truth, guaranteed against error by means of witnesses, that was to be committed to others. In the light of this Scripture we may well challenge ourselves as to how far we are answering to our responsibilities in committing to others the precious heritage of truth that we have learned from faithful men. To maintain the truth and pass it on to others is only possible as we are strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

(V. 3). The maintenance of the truth in a day of general departure will involve suffering. Naturally we shrink from suffering. Therefore, Timothy is exhorted, — and each one that desires to be true to Christ — “Take thy share in suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” Compared with Paul

the “share” of suffering we may be called to take will be small; but, wherever there is a saint today that refuses error and stands for the truth, he must be prepared in some measure to face opposition (2 Timothy 2: 25), persecution (2 Timothy 3: 12), desertion (2 Timothy 4: 10), and malice (2 Timothy 4: 14); and, as with the apostle, these things may come even from his brethren. This, however, involves suffering, and naturally when suffering unjustly we are inclined to retaliate. We are therefore reminded to take our share in suffering, not as a natural man, but “as a good soldier of Jesus Christ”. A good soldier will obey his Captain and act as he does. Christ is the great Captain of our salvation, and He has reached His place of glory “through sufferings”, and He has left us the perfect example of suffering in patience, for “when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously” (1 Peter 2: 23). To act in a way so contrary to nature will indeed demand that we should “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

The Lord Jesus is in the place of supreme power and in due course will exercise the power by which He is able to subdue all enemies under His feet. It is still, however, the day of grace; the day of judgment for the enemies of grace has not yet come. We therefore need, not power to crush our enemies, but grace to take our share in suffering. Stephen, in the presence of his enemies, who gnashed upon him with their teeth, and stoned him with their stones, looked up steadfastly into heaven to “Jesus standing at the right hand of God”. But, though Jesus is Lord in the place of supreme power, He does not generally act in power to crush the enemies of His servants, nor did He give Stephen power to crush his enemies. He did that which is in perfect keeping with the day of grace. He gave grace by which Stephen was so strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus that he was able to take his share in suffering, and, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, he did not threaten or revile his persecutors; on the contrary, he prayed for them and committed his spirit to the Lord.

Paul, likewise in his day, was so strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus that he endured suffering for Christ's sake and committed his life, his happiness, his all, unto Christ against “that day” (2 Timothy 1: 12).

(V. 4). Fourthly, if we are whole-heartedly to accept God's path in a day of failure, it will be necessary to keep ourselves from being entangled with the affairs of this life. The apostle does not suggest that we are not to attend to the affairs of this life, or that we are necessarily called to give up our earthly business. In other Scriptures he refutes such a thought, for he definitely instructs us to work with our hands to provide things honest, and can say of himself, “Ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities.” But he warns us against allowing the affairs of this life so to occupy our time, absorb our energies, and so wholly engage our minds, that we become entangled as in a net, and are no longer free to carry out the Lord's will. The good soldier of Jesus Christ is one who seeks, not to please himself, or even others, but first and foremost to please the One who has chosen him to be a soldier. In loyal allegiance to the One who has chosen us to be soldiers under His leadership, and seeking only His pleasure, we should refuse every human organisation that involves direction from some human authority. To escape the entanglements of this life and be loyal to the Captain of our salvation will only be possible as we are strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

(V. 5). Fifthly, using the public games as a figure, the apostle says, “If also anyone contend in the games, he is not crowned unless he contend lawfully.” So in the spiritual sphere, the crown will not be given for great activity, nor for the amount of service, but for faithfulness in service. The crown is given to the one who strives lawfully. It might be argued that, in a day of great weakness, we must each adopt whatever methods we think best to accomplish our service. To meet such arguments we are specially warned that, in a day of ruin, it is still incumbent upon us to “strive lawfully”. Thus the introduction of carnal methods, human devices and worldly expedients in the service of the Lord is

condemned. To serve according to the principles of Scripture will demand that we are “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

(V. 6). Sixthly, the faithful servant must be prepared to labour before partaking of the fruits. This is not our rest; it is the time of labour; the reaping time is coming. We are often over-anxious to see fruit; but it is better to persevere in our work, knowing that God is not unrighteous to forget our “work of faith and labour of love”. The faithful servant waits to hear the “Well done” of the One he seeks to please, to receive the crown after striving lawfully, and to partake of the fruits after having laboured.

(V. 7). It is not enough, however, to have these exhortations and in a general way admit their truth. If they are to govern our lives, we must consider what the apostle says; and, as we ponder these things, the Lord will give us understanding in all things. We shall make little progress in divine understanding unless we take time to meditate. The apostle can set certain truths before us, but he can not give us understanding. This the Lord alone can do. So we read that the Lord not only “opened” to the disciples the Scriptures, but He opened “their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24: 27, 32, 45).

(V. 8). Furthermore, as an encouragement to us to carry out these instructions, our gaze is directed to Christ. We are to “remember Jesus Christ raised from among the dead, of the seed of David, according to my glad tidings.” It is not simply the fact of the resurrection that we are to remember, but the One who is risen, and that as Man, the seed of David. Are we called to suffer in the path of faithfulness? Then let us remember that our “share” of suffering is small compared with the suffering He had to meet. If through any little faithfulness on our part we find ourselves deserted, opposed and insulted, even by many of the people of God, let us remember that Christ, in His perfect path, was ever faithful to God and went about doing good to men; and yet, because of His faithfulness, He was ever in reproach. Thus He could say, “For Thy sake I have borne reproach”, and again, “They have rewarded Me evil for good, and hatred for My love” (Psalm 69: 7; Psalm 109: 5).

If, in the path of service, we are exhorted to endure suffering, seeking only to *please Him* who hath chosen us, let us remember that Christ could say, “I do always those things that *please Him*” (John 8: 29). Nothing could move the Lord from the path of absolute obedience to the Father. He laboured, having in view the fruit of His toil, for He could say, “I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day” (John 9: 4). Now He has finished the work God gave Him to do; the suffering and the toil are over and we see Him risen and crowned with glory and honour, there to receive in resurrection “the fruit of the travail of His soul”. Let us, then, in our path with its measure of suffering and toil “remember Jesus Christ.”

(V. 9). Not only have we the perfect pattern of the Lord Jesus in His path of suffering and toil, but we have the example of the apostle Paul who, in his devotedness in making known the gospel, partook in no small measure of the sufferings of the life of Christ. Instead of being in honour in this world he suffered even unto bonds as an evil-doer. Thus he followed in the footsteps of His Master who was charged by the religious world of His day as being “a gluttonous man, and a winebibber”, as having “a devil”, and being “a sinner” (Luke 7: 34; John 8: 48; John 9: 24).

However, no persecution on the part of the world can hinder the blessing reaching God's elect. The world may bind the preacher: it cannot bind the word of God. Indeed, the enmity of the world that bound Paul only became an occasion to bring the gospel before the great ones of the earth, and withal to write the prison Epistles that so marvellously unfold our calling.

(V. 10). We may not be prepared to endure much suffering or insult, but the apostle can say, “I endure *all things* for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus

with eternal glory.” One has said, “How few would venture to say these words as their own souls' experience from that day to this! Nevertheless, we may earnestly desire it in our measure; but it supposes in the believer not merely a good conscience, and a heart burning in love, but himself thoroughly self-judged, and Christ dwelling in his heart by faith” (W.K.).

God's elect will assuredly obtain salvation and reach the glory. Nevertheless, on the way to the glory they will have arrayed against them all the power of Satan, the enmity of the world, and the corruptions of Christendom. So it will be through trial and suffering they will reach the glory. To bring the elect through such circumstances there will be needed all “the grace which is in Christ Jesus” ministered, as it often is, through His faithful servants.

(Vv. 11, 12). To encourage us to remember Jesus Christ and follow the example of the apostle in accepting the path of suffering and toil, we are reminded of the faithful saying, “If we have died together with Him, we shall also live together.” If we are called to “endure all things”, even death, let us not forget that we can afford to let go the present life in the light of the great truth that having died with Christ we shall surely live with Him. And not only shall we live with Him, but, “if we suffer, we shall also *reign with Him*.”

(Vv. 12, 13). There is, however, the solemn warning, “If we deny, He also will deny us; if we are unfaithful, He abides faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.” The denial here is no isolated fall, however shameful, as in the case of the apostle Peter, but the continued course of those who, whatever profession they make, deny the glory and work of the Son. Such will be denied, as it has been truly said, “God would cease to be God, if He acquiesced in the dishonour of His Son.” Amidst all the unfaithfulness of Christendom to Christ, “He abideth faithful: He *cannot* deny Himself.”

Thus the opening verses of this great passage clearly demonstrate that, in order to discern God's part in a day of ruin and, above all, to tread faithfully this path in the face of desertion, opposition and malice does not call for divine power to crush our enemies, but for the grace that is in Christ Jesus that will enable us to take our share in suffering — the grace that seeks with single eye to please the One that has chosen us; the grace that will lead us to strive lawfully, refusing all carnal and worldly methods; and the grace that prepares for patient toil while waiting for the fruits of our labour.

Moreover, we shall require, not only grace ministered from the Lord in glory, but the spiritual understanding that the Lord alone can give, and above all to have the Lord Himself before us as our one Object — a true Man of the seed of David, but a living Man in glory beyond the power of death.

(b) The course of the evil that has led to the ruin of the church as the house of God (verses 14-18)

In the opening verses of the chapter we have brought before us the spiritual condition that should characterise “faithful men” and enable them to discern the grave departure from the truth, as well as God's path in the midst of the corruption. Before setting before us God's path, the apostle, in verses 14 to 18, briefly touches upon some of the evils that have brought about the ruin of the church in responsibility.

(Vv. 14-16). Already we have learnt from the first chapter that all in Asia had turned away from the apostle. This implies that the church had not maintained itself at the height of the heavenly calling. The first step in the decline of the church was the surrender of its heavenly character. It is always the highest truth that is first given up. This surrender of the heavenly calling left open the door for the intrusion of the world and the flesh. In verse 14 of this chapter God's servant refers to the first manifestation of the corruption. He traces the ruin to speculations of the human mind leading to strife “about words to *no profit*”, and thus letting go “the word of truth”.

He warns us against disputes of words and recalls us, not only to the word of truth, but to the word of truth *rightly divided*. All Scripture is the word of truth and yet what disaster may be wrought by giving Scripture a private interpretation, or by using texts out of their context, and thus, as Peter says, wresting Scripture to our destruction.

Then we are warned of further decline. The profitless speculation of verse 14 would degenerate into “profane and vain babblings”. Babblings that are profane treat divine things as if they were common, inasmuch as they make light of sacred things. They are “vain” in that the arguments used are without any substance.

Further, we are warned that these profane and vain babblings will *increase*. As far as the mass of the Christian profession is concerned, Paul holds out no hope that the downgrade movement will be permanently arrested. On the contrary, we are definitely warned that the evil “will increase”.

Moreover, we are warned that with the increase of profane and vain babblings there will come an increase of *ungodly conduct*. Profane talk leads to ungodly walk. Holding or propagating error will, as ever, lower the outward conduct. Laxity of doctrine leads to laxity of morals.

(Vv. 17, 18). A further terrible result of the increase of profane babblings and ungodliness will be the destruction of the vital truths of Christianity in the minds of men, for we read that the word of these profane babblers will spread as *a gangrene* which eats into and destroys the vital tissues of the body.

Thus, step by step, with divine skill, the apostle traces the progress of the evil that has corrupted Christendom:

Firstly, human speculations about words to *no profit*;

Secondly, disputes about the words degenerating into *profane and vain babblings*;

Thirdly, the ever-increasing profane and vain babblings leading to *ungodliness*; the outward conduct of the Christian profession increasingly lowered to a level where men act without fear of God;

Fourthly, ungodly walk tending to destroy and rob men of the great vital truths of Christianity.

To show the effect of this degeneration and the evil condition into which Christendom would fall, the apostle gives two solemn examples. Hymenæus and Philetus, two men within the Christian profession, were teaching error. Instead of “rightly dividing the word of truth”, they had erred concerning the truth. They taught that the resurrection is past already. Apparently, they did not deny the resurrection; they appear to have spiritualised it and argued that, in some way, it had already taken place. Such an error is not to be lightly dismissed as the wild speculation of irresponsible fanatics. However unreasonable the error, the apostle foresees it will corrupt the professing church and act as a gangrene. Nor is it difficult to see that it would “overthrow the faith” of those who imbibed the error. If the resurrection is past already, it is evident that the saints have reached their final condition while yet on earth, with the result that the church ceases to look for the coming of the Lord, loses the truth of its heavenly destiny, and gives up its stranger and pilgrim character. Having lost its heavenly character, the church settles down on the earth, taking a place as part of the system for the reformation and government of the world.

When this end has been reached, the devil's work has been done and he will no longer lead his instruments to press the particular error. Today there may be no one who would attempt to teach that the resurrection is past already, but the results of this extravagant error remain and are seen fully developed in the Christian profession. The constitution, administration, religious efforts, missionary zeal of professing Christendom take for granted that the church is in her settled home and doing her

appointed work in seeking to reform the world and civilise the heathen in order to make this world a respectable and happy place.

(c) God's path for the individual in a day of ruin (verses 19-22)

(V. 19). Having foretold the evil condition into which Christendom will fall, the apostle now gives us instruction how to act in the midst of the ruin. Before doing so he brings before us two great facts for the comfort of our hearts.:

Firstly, however great the failure of man, “the foundation of God standeth sure.” The foundation is God's own work- whatever form that work may take — whether the foundation in the soul, or the foundation of the church on earth, through the instrumentality of the apostles and the coming of the Holy Spirit. No failure of man can set aside the foundation that God has laid, or prevent God from completing what He has commenced.

Secondly, for our comfort we are told, “The Lord knoweth them that are His”, and, as one has said, “This knowing is no less than an acquaintance of heart with heart, a relation between the Lord and those that are His.” The confusion has become so great, believers and unbelievers found in such close association, that, as to the mass, we cannot definitely say who is the Lord's and who is not. In such a condition, what a comfort to know that what is of God cannot be set aside, and those that are the Lord's, though hidden in the mass, cannot be ultimately lost.

God's work, and the Lord's own, will come to light in “that day” to which the apostle again and again alludes in the course of the Epistle (2 Timothy 1: 12, 18; 2 Timothy 4: 8).

Having comforted our hearts as to the abiding character of God's work and the security of those that are the Lord's, God's servant instructs the individual how to act amidst the corruptions of Christendom.

After the departure of the apostles, decline rapidly set in and has continued throughout the centuries until, today, we see in Christendom the solemn conditions foretold by Paul. Moreover, as we have seen, the apostle holds out no hope of recovery on the part of the mass. On the contrary, he warns us more than once that, with the passing of time, there will be an increase of evil. Not only profane and vain babblings will increase (2 Timothy 2: 16) but evil men and seducers shall wax worse (2 Timothy 3: 13), and the time will come when the Christian profession will not endure sound doctrine, but will turn away its ears from the truth (2 Timothy 4: 3).

If, as we are shown, there is no prospect of recovery for the great mass of the Christian profession, how is the individual to act who desires to be faithful to the Lord? This deeply serious question is taken up and answered by the apostle in the important passage that follows — a passage that clearly marks out God's path for the individual in a day of ruin (verses 19-22).

Let us first note that we are not told to leave that which professes to be the house of God on earth. This is impossible unless we leave the earth or become apostate. We are not to give up the profession of Christianity because, in the hands of men, that profession has become corrupt. Further, we are not told to reform the corrupt profession. Christendom as a whole is beyond reformation.

If, however, we are not to leave the profession, nor seek to reform the mass, nor to settle down quietly and sanction the corruption by association with it, what is the course we should pursue?

Having comforted our hearts the apostle proceeds to set before the individual believer the path God would have him to tread in a day of ruin. We may be sure that however dark the day, however difficult the times, however great the corruption, there never has been, and never will be, a period in the

church's history on earth when the godly are left without direction as to the path in the midst of the ruin. God has foreseen the ruin, and God has provided in His word for a day of ruin. Through lack of exercise we may fail to discern the path; through lack of faith we may shrink from taking it; none the less God's path is marked out for us as plainly in the darkest day as in the brightest.

If, then, God has marked out a path for His people in a day of ruin, it is evident we are not left to devise a path for ourselves or simply to do the best we can. Our part is to seek to discern God's path and step into it in the obedience of faith, while seeking grace from God to maintain us in the path.

Separation from evil is the first step in God's path. If I cannot reform the evils of Christendom, I am responsible to be right myself. Though I cannot give up the profession of Christianity, I can indeed separate from the evils of the profession. Let us carefully note how many times, under different terms and in different ways, separation from evil is urged in the Epistle. The apostle says:

“*Shun* profane and vain babblings” — 2 Timothy 2: 16;

“*Depart* from iniquity” — 2 Timothy 2: 19;

“*Purge* himself from these” (vessels to dishonour) — 2 Timothy 2: 21;

“*Flee* also youthful lusts” — 2 Timothy 2: 22;

“Foolish and senseless questionings *avoid*” — 2 Timothy 2: 23;

“From such *turn away*” — 2 Timothy 3: 5.

Firstly, then, it is incumbent upon all who name the Name of the Lord to depart (or “withdraw”) from iniquity. We must not link up the Name of the Lord with evil in any form. The confusion and disorder of Christendom has become so great that, on the one hand, we may easily misjudge that a person is not the Lord's who at heart is a real believer — but, “The Lord knoweth them that are His.” On the other hand, the one that confesses the Lord is responsible to depart from iniquity. If he refuses to do so, he cannot complain if he is misjudged. In a day of confusion it is no longer enough that a person confesses the Lord. His confession must be put to the test. The test is, do we *submit* to the authority of the Lord by departing from iniquity? To remain in association with evil and name the Name of the Lord is to connect His Name with evil.

(Vv. 20, 21). Secondly, we are not only to separate from iniquity but also from *persons* associated with evil, here called vessels to dishonour. The apostle uses the illustration of a great house of a man of the world to set forth the condition into which Christendom has fallen. That which takes the place on earth of being the house of God, instead of being apart from the world and in contrast with the world, has become like the world and the houses of the world, in which there are vessels of different materials used for different purposes, but in which vessels to honour may be found in contact with vessels to dishonour. If, however, a vessel is to be fit for the Master's use, it must not be in contact with a vessel to dishonour.

Thus, in the application, the believer who would be fit for the Lord's use must “*purge himself*” from vessels to dishonour. It has been pointed out that the only other place in the New Testament where the word translated “*purge*” is used is in 1 Corinthians 5: 7, where the Corinthians assembly is instructed to “*purge out ... the old leaven.*” When the assembly was in its normal condition, and an evil-doer was found in their midst, they were instructed to “*put away*” from among themselves the wicked person. Here the apostle foresees a time when the condition of the professing mass will be so low that there will be no power to put out the evil-doer. In such a condition, when all godly remonstrance is in vain, the godly are instructed to separate themselves from vessels to dishonour. In

both cases the principle is the same: there is to be no association between the godly and the ungodly. To refuse such association, in one case — the normal condition — the assembly is to “purge out ... the old leaven”; in the other case — when there is no longer power to deal with the evil — the vessel unto honour is to “purge himself” from the vessels to dishonour in separating himself from them. One has truly said, “If any therefore bear the Lord’s Name, who, under the plea of unity, or the love of ease, or through partiality for their friends, tolerate the evil which Scripture shows to be hateful to God, a godly man has no option, but is bound to hear the divine word and to purge himself from these vessels to dishonour.”

Thus it is clear we must cease to do evil before learning to do well; for it is only as separated from evil that anyone becomes sanctified and meet for the Master’s use and prepared unto every good work. The measure of our separation will be the measure of our preparation. One has truly said, “In every age of the church any little effort to obey this injunction has had its reward, whether observed by one or more; and whoever will take the trouble to investigate the course of any distinguished servant of the Lord, or company of believers, he will find that separation from surrounding evil was one of the leading characteristics, and that service and honour were proportionate thereto, but declined and waned as this key to service was neglected or unused.”

For his comfort and encouragement, the one acting upon this injunction is assured that he will not only be fit for the Master’s use, but that he will be “a vessel unto honour”. He may have to meet the reproaches, and even scorn, of those from whom he separates, but, says the apostle, “he shall be a vessel unto honour.”

These verses show that the separation is of a twofold character: firstly, we are to withdraw from every iniquitous system; secondly, we are to separate from dishonourable persons.

Here, then, is our warrant for the individual to separate from all these great systems of men, which set aside Christ as the alone Head of His body, which ignore the presence of the Holy Spirit, which are fast giving up the vital truths of Christianity, in which believers and unbelievers are associated together, and in which there is no power to deal with evil or admit principles that make it impossible for evil to be dealt with.

(V. 22). The instruction to separate from evil is followed by the equally important injunction, “Flee also youthful lusts.” Having separated from the corruptions of Christendom, we are to beware lest we fall into the corruptions of nature. “Youthful lusts” would not only allude to the grosser desires of the flesh, but also to all those things which fallen nature desires with the thoughtless impetuosity and self-will of youth. Never are we in greater danger of acting in the flesh than when we have acted in faithfulness to the Lord. One has said, “We may be beguiled into moral relaxation through satisfaction in our ecclesiastical separation.” How seasonable, then, is this exhortation to flee also youthful lusts, following, as it does, the injunction to withdraw from iniquity and separate from vessels to dishonour.

Having separated from the corruptions of Christendom and refused the corruptions of nature, we are exhorted to pursue certain great moral qualities which give a positive character to the path. We are not told to follow some prominent teacher, though we should gladly recognise every gift, if leading in the path that has these marks. The qualities we are to pursue are “righteousness, faith, love, peace”.

Righteousness of necessity comes first, for here it is the individual path that is in question. Having separated from iniquity we are to judge our ways and see that all our practical relations, whether in connection with the world or God’s people, are in accord with righteousness.

Faith comes next and narrows the path still more, for faith has to do with God; and not every

righteous way is a way of faith. Practical righteousness toward men, in the sense of honest dealing with one another, may exist without faith in God. God's path for His own through this world demands the constant exercise of faith in the living God. We not only need a path to tread, but we need faith to tread the path.

Love follows. If right in our practical relations with others, and walking by faith in God, our hearts will be free to go out in love to others. "Faith in Christ Jesus" is followed by "love to all the saints" (Ephesians 1: 15; Colossians 1: 4).

Peace comes last and in its due place as the outcome of righteousness, faith and love. Righteousness heads the list and peace closes it, for "the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace." Unless guarded by the qualities that precede it, the pursuit of peace may degenerate into indifference to Christ and acquiescence in evil.

Here, then, we have plain instructions for our individual path in a day of ruin. The instructions, however, do not cease with these individual directions, for, at this point, the apostle passes from what is individual to what is collective. He tells us that these qualities are to be pursued "*with those* that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart." The words "with them" clearly bring in what is collective. This is of the deepest importance, as, without this instruction, we might ask, What Scriptural warrant have we for walking with others in a day of ruin? Here is our warrant: we are not left in isolation. There will always be others who, in a day of ruin, call upon the Lord out of a pure heart. Calling upon the Lord is the expression of dependence upon the Lord and seems specially connected with a day of departure from the Lord. In the evil days of Seth we read, "Then began men to call upon the Name of the Lord." So, too, we read of Abraham, when he came out from country, kindred and father's house, that he "called upon the Name of the Lord." Thus we have a company who, in loyalty to the Lord, have separated from the corruptions of Christendom and, in this outside place, walk in dependence upon the Lord, and do so as having a pure heart. A pure heart is not one that claims to be pure, but rather one that, under the eye of the Lord, follows righteousness, faith, love and peace.

Thus we have a definite path marked out by the word of God for a day of ruin characterised:

Firstly, by separation from the corruptions of Christendom;

Secondly, by separation from the corruptions of the flesh;

Thirdly, by the pursuit of certain moral qualities;

Fourthly, by association with those who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart.

If, then, a few find themselves together, according to these plain directions, the question may well arise, What principles are to guide them in their worship, in remembering the Lord, in their meetings for edification, in their service, and in their manner of life toward one another and the world? The reply is simple: such will at once find there is available for their guidance all the principles for the ordering of every detail of God's assembly, as brought before us in the Epistle to the Corinthians and other portions of the New Testament, principles which no ruin in the church can set aside. Moreover, having separated from the evils of Christendom, such will find that many principles and directions for the practical administration of the church, which would be hardly possible to carry out in the systems of men, can now be applied in simplicity. Thus those who accept God's path in a day of ruin will find that it is still possible to walk *in the light of the assembly* as constituted in the beginning. They will not, indeed, set up to be the assembly, or even a model of the assembly for, at most, they are but a few individuals who have separated from the corruptions of Christendom and hence, if a witness, are only a witness to the ruined condition of the church in these closing days, rather than a pattern of the church in

its early days.

(d) The spirit in which to meet opposition (verses 23-26)

In the closing verses of the chapter we have an important warning to the servant of the Lord. In reference to this path of separation from the corruptions of Christendom, the apostle foresees that if there are those who will obey these directions, there will also be those by whom they will be strenuously opposed. The assertion of these truths will call forth a crop of “foolish and unlearned questions”. Experience has shown how true this is. Almost every argument that human ingenuity can suggest has been used to set aside the plain instructions of this passage. We are warned that these arguments will “gender strifes”. Whatever happens, the servant of the Lord is not to be drawn into strife — he “must not strive.” If he allows himself to be drawn into strife, he may find himself thoroughly defeated, though standing for the absolute truth. The servant is to remember that he is only the servant and not the Master. As the servant of the Lord, it is his business to exhibit the character of the Lord — gentleness, aptness to teach, patience and meekness in the presence of opposition. The natural tendency is to defend and cling to that with which one is associated, even though it be thoroughly unscriptural. Hence the first effect of the presentation of these truths is often to raise opposition. If, as it may be, the servant himself once opposed, it becomes him to have great patience and great meekness in seeking to instruct others. In presenting the truth it must not be with the thought that by his clear presentation, or meekness of manner, it will be accepted, but with the definite sense that it is only God who can bring anyone “to the acknowledging of the truth”.

4 The Resources of the Godly in the Last Days

(2 Timothy 3)

In the second chapter we have been instructed as to the low condition of the professing church, manifesting itself already in that day. This third chapter gives a solemn description of the terrible condition into which the Christian profession will fall in the last days.

Living in these days we may be thankful that we are not left to form our own judgment as to the condition of Christendom. God has foretold and described this condition, so that we can have a just and divinely-given estimate of the professing people of God.

Having no true thought of Christianity as presented in Scripture, the mass of the Christian profession view Christianity merely as a religious system whereby the world will be gradually reformed and the heathen civilised. Even many of God's children, with but a partial knowledge of the salvation that the gospel brings, cherish the false expectation that, by the spread of the gospel, the world will gradually be converted and the Millennium introduced.

Thus amongst mere professors, and with many of the true children of God, there is the wrong impression that Christendom is progressing towards a triumphant victory over the world, the flesh and the devil. The plain truth of Scripture is that the church, viewed as in the responsibility of men, has been so entirely ruined that the mass of those who form Christendom are passing on to judgment.

The inspired writers of the New Testament unite in warning us of the prevailing evil of the Christian profession in the last days and of the judgment that will overtake Christendom. James tells us that “the Judge standeth before the door” (James 5: 7-9); Peter warns us that “judgment must begin at the house of God” and that, in the last days, the Christian profession will be marked by scoffers and

gross materialism (1 Peter 4: 17; 2 Peter 3: 3-5); John warns us that in the last hour antichrists will arise from the Christian circle (1 John 2: 18, 19); Jude tells us of the coming apostasy; and the apostle in this solemn passage prepares us for the appalling corruption that will mark the Christian profession at its close.

Nevertheless, if for our warning we have this detailed description of the end of the closing days, so for the encouragement of the godly we have an equally plain unfolding of the fulness of our resources to enable the believer to escape the corruptions of Christendom and live piously in Christ Jesus.

These, then, are the two great themes of this third chapter — the evil of professing Christendom in the last days and the resources of the godly in the presence of the evil.

(a) The corruption of Christendom in the last days (verses. 1-9)

(V. 1). God would not have us ignorant as to the condition of Christendom, nor, under any specious plea of charity, affect indifference to the evil. Therefore the servant of the Lord opens this part of his instruction with the words, “This *know also* ... ” He then proceeds to warn us that “in the last days perilous (or 'difficult') times shall come.”

(Vv. 2-5). The apostle proceeds to give with the utmost precision a terrible picture of the condition into which Christendom will fall by delineating in detail the outstanding characteristics of those who will form the mass of the Christian profession in these last days. The Spirit of God speaks of these religious professors as “men” for there is no ground for calling them saints or believers. Yet, be it noted, the apostle is not describing the condition of heathen “men” but of those who make a Christian profession by affecting the outward form of godliness. In this terrible picture nineteen characteristics are passed before us.

(1) “Men shall be lovers of their own selves.” The first and outstanding characteristic of Christendom in these last days is the love of self. This is in direct contrast with true Christianity which teaches us that Christ “died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again.”

(2) “Covetous” or “lovers of money”. Loving self will lead to loving money, for therewith men can purchase that which will minister to the gratification of self. Christianity teaches us that the love of money is the root of all evil, and that those who covet it will wander from the faith and pierce themselves through with many sorrows (1 Timothy 6: 10).

(3) “Boasters”. The love of money will turn men into boasters. We read in Scripture of those “that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches” (Psalm 49: 6); and again, “The wicked boasteth of his heart’s desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth” (Psalm 10: 3). Not only do men boast in their skill in acquiring wealth, but, having accumulated riches, they often take occasion to blazon forth their deeds of charity, in contrast with the lowly grace of Christianity which teaches us so to give that the left hand knows not what the right hand doeth.

(4) “Proud” or “arrogant”. The boastfulness that glories in self is closely allied with the arrogance or pride that makes much of birth, social position and natural endowments, in contrast with Christianity which leads us to count these things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.

(5) “Blasphemers” or “evil speakers”. Pride leads to blasphemy. Proud of their achievements and their intellectual abilities, men do not hesitate to “speak evil of the things that they understand not” (2

Peter 2: 12); and “speak great words against the Most High” and attack the Person and work of Christ, refusing revelation and scoffing at inspiration.

(6) “Disobedient to parents”. If men are capable of blasphemy against God, it is little wonder that they are disobedient to parents. If they have little respect for divine Persons, they will have no respect for human relationships.

(7) “Unthankful” or “ungrateful”. By those who are disobedient to parents, every mercy from God or men is received as a matter of right wherein there is no call for gratitude. Christianity teaches us that all creature mercies are “to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth” (1 Timothy 4: 3).

(8) “Unholy” or “profane”. If ungrateful for blessings temporal and spiritual, men will soon scorn and despise the mercy and grace that bestow the blessings. Esau profanely despised the birthright by which God would have blessed him.

(9) “Without natural affection”. The man who treats lightly the love and mercy of God will soon lose natural affection towards his fellow men. The love of self leads to indifference to the ties of family life, or even to view them as a hindrance to self- gratification.

(10) “Truce breakers” or “implacable”. The man who is proof against the appeal of natural affection will surely be implacable, or one that is not open to conviction and who cannot be appeased.

(11) “False accusers” or “slanderers”. The one whose vindictive spirit is proof against every appeal will not hesitate to slander or falsely accuse those who cross his will.

(12) “Incontinent” or “of unsubdued passions”. The man that does not hesitate to slander others with his tongue will be one that easily loses control of himself and acts without restraint.

(13) “Fierce” or “savage”. The one who slanders others in speech and is unrestrained in actions will exhibit a savage disposition wholly lacking in the gentleness that marks the Christian spirit.

(14) “Despisers of those that are good” or “having no love for what is good”. The savage disposition inevitably blinds men to what is good. It is not only that there are those in the Christian profession who love evil, but they actually hate “what is good”.

(15) “Traitors”. Having no love for that which is good, men will not hesitate to act with the malice that betrays confidences and has no respect for the intimacies of those that they profess to treat as friends.

(16) “Heady” or “headlong”. The man who can betray his friends is one who will determinedly pursue his own will indifferent to consequences and without consideration for others.

(17) “High-minded” or “of vain pretensions”. Filled with self-conceit, the heady man seeks to cover his self-will under the vain pretence that he is acting for the general good.

(18) “Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God”. Men's pretensions being vain, their pursuits will be equally lacking in all seriousness. The clouds of coming judgment may be gathering but Christendom, blinded by its own vanity and selfishness, abandons itself to a whirl of excitement, seeking to find its pleasure in sensuous enjoyment, too often the professed ministers of religion being the leaders in every kind of worldly pleasure.

(19) “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof”. Thus in the closing days of Christendom the professing mass will be found abandoning themselves to every form of evil, while seeking to cover their wickedness with the cloak of sanctity. Thus nominal Christians become more

wicked than pagans, for, while indulging in all the evils of paganism, they add to their wickedness by seeking to hide it under the form of Christianity, though utterly devoid of its spiritual power. What can be more desperately wicked than the effort to use the Name of Christ as a cloak for evil? It is this cloak of sanctity that constitutes the last days' "difficult times", for the show of piety at times deceives even true Christians.

It will be noticed that the first and outstanding evil in this terrible picture is the uncontrollable selfishness of men that leads to every other evil. Men, being lovers of self, will covet for self and boast in self. Boasting in self, they will be impatient of all restraint upon self, whether human or divine. The love of self and gratification of self will make men unthankful, unholy and lead them to over-ride natural affection, and make them unrelenting and slanderers. The love of self will lead men to give free rein to their passions, leading to savagery in the presence of all that thwarts their will. It will lead men to despise what is good, to betray confidences, and, with headlong vanity, to be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

Such is the terrible picture that Scripture presents of the last days of the Christian profession. Israel, that was set apart from all nations to bear witness to the true God, so thoroughly broke down in responsibility that at last it had to be said to them "the Name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you" (Romans 2: 24). But with far greater light and greater privileges, how much more terrible has been the breakdown of the professing church. Set up to be a witness for Christ in the time of His absence, the great mass of those who profess the Name of Christ have sunk below the level of the heathen and have become the expression of the will and passions of men, and so brought the blessed Name of Christ into reproach. Can we wonder that the end will be that that which professes the Name of Christ on earth will be spued out of His mouth?

Nevertheless, let us not forget that in the midst of this vast profession God has His own, and the Lord knoweth them that are His. Not one of His own will be lost, and at last those who form the true church of God will be presented to Christ without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

In the meantime the true people of God — those who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart — are plainly instructed to "turn away" from the corrupt profession of Christendom. We are not called to strive with those who form this great profession, still less call down judgment upon them. We are to turn away from such and leave them to the judgment of God.

Only as we are separate from the corrupt profession of Christendom shall we truly appreciate its fearful condition or be any adequate witness to the truth.

Realising the condition of Christendom, we shall humble ourselves before God, confessing our failure and weakness, remembering that we too have the flesh in us that, but for His mercy, can easily betray us into any of these evils.

(Vv. 6-9). The writer has described the terrible condition that will mark Christendom as a whole in the last days. He now warns us against a particular evil that will develop out of this corruption. A special class will arise who are the active instruments in resisting the truth by teaching error.

Quite apart from their false teaching such are condemned by the underhand methods they adopt. We read that they "creep into houses". It is characteristic of error that it shuns the light and must first be promulgated secretly. Then, when the ground has been secretly prepared by underhand methods, the propounders of the error do not fear to declare openly their false doctrine. The error being publicly declared, it generally comes to light that for years it has been secretly held and taught.

Further, these false teachers are condemned by the fact that they make their appeal to those

characterised as “silly women”, who would be in a position to influence the homes and families of professing Christians. The apostle probably uses the contemptuous term “silly women” to set forth an effeminate class of persons (whether male or female) who are governed by their emotions and lusts, rather than by conscience and reason. With minds obsessed with error, though priding themselves that they are “ever learning”, they are “never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Error leaves its victims in the darkness of uncertainty.

Such teachers, like Jannes and Jambres of old, withstand the truth by the imitation of the outward forms of religion, while wholly destitute of all that is vital in Christianity. Such are “men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith”. Every false system in Christendom can be traced to men whose minds have been corrupted by evil and who are found worthless as regards the faith.

Nevertheless, God, in His governmental ways, often allows these false teachers to be thoroughly exposed before the eyes of “all men”. Again and again “the folly” of these religious systems, as well as the evil lives of many of their leaders, have been so fully exposed before the world that they have become objects of contempt in the eyes of all but their deluded victims.

(b) The resources of the godly in the presence of the evil (verses 10-17)

In the latter half of the chapter we are instructed in the rich provision that God has made in order that His people may be preserved from the corruptions of Christendom and act as becomes the man of God in the last days.

(Vv. 10, 11). Firstly, we are definitely told that the great safeguard against all that is false is *the knowledge of that which is true*. Thus the apostle can say to Timothy, “Thou hast *fully known my doctrine*, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions.” There is no necessity to know fully the evil, for we do not escape evil simply by the knowledge of it. It is by the knowledge of the truth that we can detect that which is false and contrary to the truth; and having detected the evil, we are exhorted not to be occupied with it, but to “turn away” from those who pursue it. The truth has been set forth in the apostle's doctrine and unfolded to us in his Epistles. It may be summed up as the complete setting aside of man after the flesh as wholly corrupt and under death, the condemnation of the old man in the cross of Christ, and the bringing in of a new man in life and incorruptibility, set forth in Christ risen and glorified, to whom believers, from the Jews and Gentiles, are united in one body by the Holy Spirit.

This doctrine Paul can say to Timothy, “Thou hast fully known”. The more fully we enter into Paul's doctrine the more definitely we shall be able to detect and turn away from the evil of these last days.

Secondly, the apostle can appeal to his “manner of life”. His life was wholly consistent with the doctrine that he taught. In this, doubtless, there is an intended contrast between the apostle and the evil teachers of whom he has been speaking. Their folly is exposed inasmuch as their lives are an evident contradiction to the piety they profess. It is manifest to all that their profession of the form of piety has no power over their lives. With the apostle it was far otherwise. In his doctrine he proclaimed the heavenly calling of the saints and, in consistency with his doctrine, his manner of life was that of a stranger and a pilgrim whose citizenship is in heaven. It was a life governed by a definite “purpose”, lived by “faith”, exhibiting the character of Christ in all “long-suffering, love, endurance”, involving “persecutions” and “sufferings”. Thus the first great safeguard from the evil of the last days is the knowledge of the truth; and the second safeguard is a life lived in consistency with the truth. There is, however, a further source of security, for, thirdly, we read of *the support of the Lord*. To this Paul can witness from his own experience, for, speaking of the sufferings and persecutions that his life involved,

he can say, “Out of them all the Lord delivered me.” If we are diligent to know the doctrine, if we are prepared to live a life consistent with the doctrine, we shall realise the support of the Lord. Others may forsake us even as they did the apostle; others may think we are too extreme and too uncompromising; but, in contending for the faith, we shall find even as he did, that the Lord will stand by us, He will strengthen us, He will enable us to proclaim the truth, He will deliver us out of the mouth of the lion and from every evil work, and He will preserve us unto His heavenly kingdom (2 Timothy 3: 11; 2 Timothy 4: 17, 18).

(Vv. 12, 13). We are reminded how needed is the support of the Lord by being warned that all that desire to live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. The form the persecution takes may vary at different times and in different places, but it remains true that the one who stands apart from the evil of Christendom and seeks to maintain the truth must be prepared for desertion, insults and malice. How can it be otherwise when, in Christendom itself, “evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived”?

(V. 14). Fourthly, in the presence of evil, the godly will find safety and support by *abiding in the things we have learned through the apostle*. Thus he writes to Timothy, “Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.” For the third time in the course of this short Epistle Paul emphasises the importance, not only of having the truth, but of receiving it from an inspired source if it is to be held with full assurance (see 2 Timothy 1: 13; 2 Timothy 2: 2).

Experience proves too often that believers can make no definite stand against error because they are not “fully persuaded” of the truth. In the presence of error, and especially of error mixed with truth, we need to be absolutely assured that the things we have learned are indeed true. This assurance we can only have by knowing that the one from whom we have received the truth speaks with inspired authority. A teacher can bring the truth before us, but no teacher can speak with inspired authority. He must direct us to the inspired writings of the apostles if we are to hold the truth in faith and assurance. In the presence of evil men and seducers, waxing worse and worse, ever bringing forth new developments of evil, we may well beware of all that professes to be new light and continue in the things we have learned.

(Vv. 15-17). Thus the final safeguard against error is *the inspiration and sufficiency of the holy Scriptures*. Men pour forth their endless and changing theories, but in the Scriptures we have every truth that would be for our profit preserved in a permanent form, guarded from error by inspiration, and presented with divine authority.

Doubtless, the Holy Scriptures which Timothy had known from a child would be the Old Testament Scriptures. But, when the apostle further states, “Every Scripture is divinely inspired” (N.T.), he includes the New Testament with all the apostolic writings. We know that Peter classes all Paul's Epistles with “the other Scriptures” (2 Peter 3: 16).

Moreover, there is set before us the great gain of the Scriptures. Firstly, they are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Secondly, having been directed to Christ so that we find in Him salvation, we shall further discover that “every Scripture” is “profitable” for the believer, inasmuch as in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms, we shall discover things concerning Christ (Luke 24: 27, 44). Furthermore, we shall find how profitable the Scriptures are for “conviction”. Alas! we may be blind to our own faults, and so filled with our own self-importance that we are deaf to remonstrance from others; but, if subject to the word, we shall find that Scripture brings conviction for it is living and “powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword ... a discerner of the

thoughts and intents of the heart.”

Moreover, the Scriptures not only convict, but they are also profitable for “correction”. Having convicted they will correct; and having corrected they will instruct us in the way that is right. Having, then, the inspired Scriptures it is possible for the man of God to be completely established in the truth in the presence of abounding error, and to be “fully fitted to every good work” in an evil day.

5 The Service of God in a Day of Ruin

(2 Timothy 4)

In the third chapter the apostle has very fully foretold the terrible condition of the Christian profession in the last days and, further, has reminded believers of the rich provision that God has made in order that they may be “furnished unto all good works” in a day of abounding evil.

Having set forth the ruin of the profession and the resources of the godly, Paul, in this fourth chapter, gives special instruction for the service of the Lord in the day of general failure.

Experience tells us that in a day of increasing evil in the Christian profession and weakness among the people of God, the servant can easily be discouraged and lose heart in his service. Hence the importance of these instructions in which the writer, instead of allowing the sorrowful and hopeless state of Christendom to be an excuse for apathy on the part of the servant, uses it as an incentive to more earnest service.

(V. 1). The apostle opens this portion of his instruction by presenting the grounds of his appeal to believers to persevere in their service for the Lord. He speaks with all solemnity as before God and Christ Jesus, the great Observers of our position and of the stand we make, and urges us to service in view of three great facts:

Firstly, Christ is the Judge of the living and the dead. He is the Arbiter of the path we tread and of our condition in that path. Moreover, such is the condition of the Christian profession, that the greater number is unconverted and passing on to judgment, either as living men when Christ appears or as numbered with the dead at the Great White Throne. It becomes us then to warn men of the coming judgment and point them to the Saviour.

Secondly, Paul encourages us to continue in our service by the great truth of the appearing of Christ. The better translation is “and by His appearing”, making the appearing a second and distinct fact from the judgment of the living and the dead. He does not speak of the rapture, but of the appearing of Christ to reign, for the reward for service is always connected with the appearing. The word is, “Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is *with Me*, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Revelation 22: 12).

Thirdly, we are encouraged to service by “His kingdom”. Every soul saved through the preaching of the gospel will add to the glory of Christ when He comes to reign and be glorified in His saints.

Whether, then, it be the judgment of the wicked, the reward of the servant, or the glory of Christ, there is every incentive for the servant to persevere in his service.

(V. 2). Having stated the grounds of his appeal the apostle delivers his charge to serve. If men are responsible to God, then “proclaim the word; be urgent in season and out of season.” If Christ is going to judge, then “convict” and “rebuke” those who live in a way that calls for judgment. If the saints are

going to be rewarded at the appearing of Christ, then “encourage, with all long-suffering and doctrine.”

The servant is to proclaim “the word”. This is not simply the gospel to the sinner, but “the word” of God to both sinner and saint. There is a necessity too for urgency in preaching, as well as to preach at all seasons. The word of God is for all people at all times. Conviction and rebuke may be called for, both among saints and sinners. But this can only be by the preaching of the word, for it is only the word that produces conviction. We may seek to convict and rebuke by our own words and arguments, only to find that we irritate and call forth resentment. Rebukes, if they are to be effectual, must be based upon the word of God. For those who are willing to bow to the word and accept its convictions and rebukes, there is the word of encouragement.

Whatever form the service may take, it is to be carried out with all long-suffering and according to the truth or “doctrine”. The word will assuredly raise the opposition of the flesh and this will call for long-suffering on the part of the servant, and the only effectual answer to opposition is in the doctrine or truth of Scripture.

(Vv. 3, 4). In the first verse God's servant has looked beyond the present period and, in the light of what is coming, presses the urgency of service. Now again he looks on, but to the end of the Christian period, and uses the appalling conditions that will be found among the professors of Christianity as a fresh incentive for activity in service. Already he has spoken of false teachers that creep into houses; now he speaks of the people themselves. Whether teachers fail or not, the time will come when the people, “having itching ears”, will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts will they heap to themselves teachers. This is not a description of heathen who have never heard the truth, but of Christendom wherein men have heard the gospel but will no longer endure it. Even so, they do not give up all profession of Christianity for they still heap to themselves teachers, but they must be teachers who do not interfere with the gratification of their worldly lusts by preaching the truth.

That companies of professing Christians should choose a teacher is entirely foreign to Scripture and shows how far Christendom has departed from the order of God for His assembly. The result of this disorder is that too often the chosen teacher is but a blind leader of the blind, and “if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Matthew xv. 14). Thus it comes to pass, that in turning from the truth, men “shall be turned unto fables.”

(V. 5). If, then, the condition of Christendom has become so appalling that those who profess Christianity will not endure sound doctrine, follow their lusts and turn to fables, it behoves the servant to “be sober in all things”, having his judgment formed by the truth and not allowing his mind to be influenced by the evils and fables of the professing mass.

Already we have been exhorted to “suffer evil along with the glad tidings”, to take our “share in suffering” as good soldiers of Jesus Christ; and we have been warned that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 1: 8; 2 Timothy 2: 3; 2 Timothy 3: 12). Now we are further warned that we must be prepared to “endure afflictions” because of the evils of Christendom.

Thus the faithful must be prepared for suffering because of the gospel, for the sake of Jesus Christ on the ground of piety of a Christian type, and in view of the evils of the day.

Further, however evil the day, and as long as the day of grace continues, the man of God, whatever his gift, is to pursue his work as an evangelist. The abandonment of the truth by the mass, with the greater part of their so-called churches given up to worldliness and fables, only makes it more incumbent upon the man of God to continue evangelistic work, and fill up the full measure of his

ministry. The Lord's work is not to be half done. We are to seek to finish to perfection that which He gives us to do.

(V. 6). The servant of Christ now refers to his departure as another incentive for service. The end of his life of devotedness, and the consequent persecution from the world, was so near that he could say, "I am already being poured out." He speaks of his departure as the time of his "release". For him to leave this scene was a release from a body that kept him from Christ, but he presents it as a reason for Timothy filling up the full measure of his ministry. How often, since that day, has the removal of a devoted servant been used of the Lord to stir up those who are left to active service.

(V. 7). If, however, the church was going to be bereft of the active guidance of the apostle, his example remains for our encouragement. Here, then, Paul on the eve of his departure looks back over his path as a servant, and looks on to the day of glory when his service will have its bright reward. Looking back, he can say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." In Paul's day the faith was already assailed on every side, and it is still more attacked in our day. Outwith the Christian circle it was opposed by Jewish ritualists and Gentile philosophers. Within the Christian profession there were those who "erred concerning the faith" (1 Timothy 6: 21), and some who were "reprobate concerning the faith" (2 Timothy 3: 8). In the presence of those attacks from within and without Paul could say, "I have fought the good fight." He had fought for the faith and he had "kept the faith".

"The faith" is more than the gospel of our salvation; it centres in Christ and embraces the glories of His Person and the greatness of His work. It involves the whole truth of Christianity. The apostle boldly fought for the faith, refusing to allow any inroad upon it from any quarter. No false charity was allowed to interfere with his uncompromising defence of the glory of the Person and work of Christ.

(V. 8). Having fought the good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith, he could look on with great assurance to the future and say, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." He had trodden the path of righteousness (2 Timothy 2: 22), followed the instruction of righteousness (2 Timothy 3: 16), and now looked on to wear the crown of righteousness.

Moreover, the crown of righteousness will be given to the apostle by the Lord, the righteous Judge. He had maintained the rights of the Lord in the day of His rejection, and he will receive the crown of righteousness in the day of His glory. Man had given the apostle a prison; many of the saints had deserted him, and some had opposed him; but, with him it was "a very small thing" that he should be judged of the saints or of man's judgment. For him the Lord was the Judge (1 Corinthians 4: 3-5). He does not say that the judgment of the saints as to the faithfulness, or otherwise, of his course was nothing; but, compared with the judgment of the Lord, it was a very small thing. Too often our judgments of one another are warped by petty personalities and selfish considerations. The Lord is the righteous Judge.

For the third time in the course of the Epistle, the apostle refers to "that day" (2 Timothy 1: 12, 18; 2 Timothy 4: 8). In all the sufferings, persecutions, desertions and insults that he had to meet, that day shone brightly before him — the day of the Lord's appearing. How much there is that we cannot understand and cannot unravel, how many slights and insults in the presence of which we have to be silent in this day. But from all these things we can find relief by committing them to the Lord — the righteous Judge — against *that day*, when He will both "bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God" (1 Corinthians 4: 5).

Further, for our encouragement, we are told that the crown of righteousness is not simply

reserved for an apostle, or a gifted servant, but for “all them also that love His appearing”. We may think that the crown of righteousness is reserved for great activity in the Lord's work, or only for those who are in the forefront as leaders of God's people; but the word does not say the crown is for those who work, or for those who are prominent, but for those that love His appearing. Truly, the great theme of this portion of the Epistle is to encourage the servant *to* work; but let him be careful that his work is governed by love. Loving His appearing implies that we love the One who is going to appear and, loving Him, we love to think of the day when the One, who is now rejected and despised of men, will “come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.” Moreover, to love His appearing supposes that we are walking in self-judgment, for we read, “Every man that hath this hope in Him” — the hope of being like Christ when He appears — “purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (1 John 3: 3).

In the closing verses of the Epistle we have a beautiful picture of the graces of Christ, the Christian affections and the interests of the Lord that bind individual saints together; precious at any time, but how much more so in a day of weakness and failure when they that fear the Lord speak often one to the other.

(V. 9). Already Paul has expressed his desire to see Timothy, his dearly beloved (2 Timothy 1: 4); now, in view of his speedy release, he urges Timothy to come quickly.

(Vv. 10, 11). He longed to see Timothy all the more because he had suffered the loss of a fellow-labourer. Demas had forsaken the apostle, having loved this present world. It does not say that Demas had forsaken Christ, but he found it impossible to go on with such a devoted representative of Christ and at the same time keep in with the present world. One or the other had to be given up. Alas! he forsook Paul and chose the world. Others had departed, doubtless on the service of the Lord. Only Luke was with him. This faithful companion of his active labours abode with him in his dying moments, and the apostle delights to record his devoted love.

Paul especially desires that Timothy should bring Mark. There had been a time when Mark had turned back from the work and the apostle, on that account, faithfully refused to take him on his second journey on the Lord's service. He judged it would not be profitable. This failure on the part of Mark had evidently been judged, and therefore all feeling removed, and no further allusion to the failure is made. If this were the only reference to Mark, we never should have known of any failure in service. Already Paul had specially commended him to the Colossian assembly (Colossians 4: 10); now he desires his presence, and especially notices that, in the very matter in which he had failed, this restored servant would be most serviceable, for, says the apostle, “He is profitable to me *for the ministry*.”

(V. 12). Tychicus, who apparently had formerly been sent by the apostle to Crete (Titus 3: 12) was now sent to Ephesus. He was one who was willing to serve under the direction of Christ's servant.

(V. 13). The natural man might wonder that, in this important pastoral charge, the apostle should stop to speak of a cloak and of books. We forget that the God who has provided for our eternal blessing is not unmindful of our smallest temporal needs. The cloak we wear and the books we read are not matters of indifference to Him. In our folly we may think such things beneath His notice; so thinking, these very things — the dress we wear, the books we read — often become our greatest snares.

(Vv. 14, 15). Alexander is referred to, not as a teacher of error, as in the case of Hymenæus, nor as loving this present world like Demas. He is rather an active personal enemy of the apostle, and, being actuated by personal enmity, it mattered not what Paul said, Alexander *withstood his words*. Such people existed in the apostle's day, and there are such, alas, still found in the Christian profession, who resist what is said, not because it is wrong, but because of enmity to the person who speaks. Conscious

of the unrighteousness of such people, we can easily be thrown off our guard and meet the flesh by acting in the flesh. The Lord's servant does not render to such an one evil for evil, or railing for railing. He does not say, "I will attempt to deal with him according to his works"; he commits the whole matter to the Lord, and can therefore say, "The Lord will render to him according to his works." Nevertheless, he warns Timothy to be on his guard against him. Alas! that there should be those in the Christian profession against whom it is necessary to warn the saints.

(V. 16). The apostle found in his day, as so many have found since, that the path narrows as we near the goal. Thus when arraigned before the powers of this world, he has to say, "No man stood with me, but all men forsook me." This treatment, which appears to be heartless and cowardly, raises no resentment in Paul's heart. On the contrary, it calls forth his prayer for them "that it may not be laid to their charge."

(V. 17). If all others fail and forsake us, the Lord's words will ever remain true, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." So Paul found, in the day of his desertion by the saints, that the Lord stood with Him and gave him "power". If, however, the Lord gives power, it is not power to crush our enemies, or power to deliver ourselves from trying circumstances, but spiritual power to bear witness for Himself in the presence of His enemies. So the apostle can say, "The Lord stood with me, and gave me power, that through me the proclamation might be fully made, and all those of the nations should hear." From the records of Paul's preaching we know that the proclamation was the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins "through this Man" — Christ Jesus, the risen Man in the glory (Acts 13: 38). If Paul had power given to him to proclaim Christ, the Lord Himself exercised His power to deliver His servant from the immediate danger. So he can say, not, "I delivered myself", but, "I was delivered out of the lion's mouth."

(V. 18). Moreover, the apostle can look on with confidence and say, "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom." As the Psalmist can say, "The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil; he shall preserve thy soul" (Psalm 121: 7). The heavenly kingdom may indeed be reached through a martyr's death, but the soul will be preserved through every evil.

With this heavenly kingdom in view, God's faithful servant can close his Epistle with a burst of praise to the One who, in spite of all desertion by saints, the power of the lion and every evil work, will preserve His people unto His Kingdom — "to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

(V. 19). Paul adds a closing salutation to two saints, Priscilla and Aquila, who had been associated with him in his early labours and had remained faithful to him in his closing days (Acts 18: 2). Again, too, he thinks of the household of one that was not ashamed of his chain (2 Timothy 1: 16-18).

(V. 20). With the interest that we cannot but take in the movements, labours and welfare of faithful servants of the Lord, Paul, in his day, records the fact that "Erastus abode at Corinth" and that Trophimus had been left at Miletum sick. Apparently the miraculous power of healing which, in the course of his testimony, had been so strikingly used by the apostle, was never used for the relief of a brother or a friend. As one has said, "Miracles as a rule were signs for unbelievers, not a means for cure for the household of faith."

(V. 21). No detail that concerns His children is too small for the consideration of our God and Father. Already Paul has referred to the cloak and the books; now he thinks of the season. Timothy is to endeavour to come before the winter would add to the hardships of his journey.

Three brothers and a sister are mentioned by name as sending greetings to Timothy together with “all the brethren”, a proof not only of the love and esteem in which Timothy was held, but of the apostle's care to promote love amongst the saints.

(V. 22). Very beautifully Paul closes the Epistle to Timothy with the desire that the Lord Jesus Christ may be with his spirit. How often we may be right in doctrine and principle, and even outward conduct, and yet all be marred by being wrong in spirit. If the Lord Jesus is with us in spirit, we shall exhibit in our words and ways “the spirit of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1: 19). For this, Timothy and the saints with him needed grace; so the apostle closes his Epistle with the desire, “Grace be with you.”

May we, too, in these more difficult times know how to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, that our spirits may be kept in the presence of every effort of the enemy to mar our testimony by arousing the flesh. We need unyielding faithfulness in the maintenance of the truth, combined with the gentleness of Christ, lest even the way of truth be evil spoken of.