

Faithful Men

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"Thou, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, that they may be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2: 1, 2):

In connection with this passage, I read in Exodus 25: 10-11, 16, 21-22:

The ark was made of shittim wood. In studying the tabernacle, the ark is that which suggests the Person of Christ. The shittim wood represents His humanity, the Son of God come down here as Man. I take the pure gold to represent that perfect suitability to God which was and is found in Christ, perfect suitability to the glory of God. In the ark was to be put the testimony which the Lord gave to Israel. The two tables of stone, or "the testimony," showed that what God required was perfect love toward Himself and perfect love toward men. These things are seen in Christ in all their completeness, and are fulfilled in Him alone. Upon the ark was placed the mercy-seat of which I do not now speak particularly. Christ, in the presence of God, is the One in whom God's testimony is from first to last preserved intact. As to the wanderings of the children of Israel, when they left Egypt they turned *eastward* to Sinai, and from Sinai they turned *northward* to Kadesh-Barnea. From thence, they went *southward* to the shores of the Red Sea, and again turned northward to the plains of Moab; finally they went *westward* into the land. But whether they turned east or north, south or west, the testimony of God was preserved intact in the ark. There was no abatement of God's standard, and His eye rested upon that which, in the type, maintained that standard at its full height. You may wonder what that has to do with the Epistle to Timothy. But no one can read the second epistle without noticing how that again and again in the midst of all the frightful failure spoken of, there are certain things that are preserved intact *in Christ Jesus*. Israel, the people of God, in the course of their journeyings, at times seem to be turning their backs upon their true and proper direction, as when they turned southward to the shores of the Red Sea. Nevertheless, the ark, with its testimony inside preserved everything for God in perfect suitability to Him.

In this 2nd Epistle to Timothy we have seven things preserved for God, and for us, in Christ Jesus. In 2 Tim. 1 we have "*life* which is in Christ Jesus" What a comfort for us, what security, what suitability for God, that the life which God in grace has made ours is secured and set forth in Christ Jesus. Then lower down, in verse 9 "*His own purpose and grace* which was given us in Christ Jesus" Further, in verse 13, "*faith and love* which is in Christ Jesus," and in the verse which I read in 2 Tim. 2, "*the grace* that is in Christ Jesus." Further on, in 2 Tim. 2: 10, "*the salvation* which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory," and then "*all that will live godly* in Christ Jesus," in 2 Tim. 3: 15, and finally "*faith* in Christ Jesus." in verse 15. You have the testimony preserved in the ark. Christ's perfect suitability to the glory of God secures everything for people, whatever their changing experience may be.

Now, as to the condition in which we are found in these last days, turn back to 2 Tim. 1: 15. You will notice that Paul says, "This *thou* knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me," a very serious state of things when we remember the peculiar place that was given to the apostle Paul in the Christian economy. He is the one to whom was committed the administration of the mystery, and who committed the administration of the mystery, and who was constituted pre-eminently minister of the Gospel. For these Christians of Asia to turn away from Paul meant decline from, and the surrender of, the teaching of Paul. In 2 Tim. 2: 16, you find "Shun profane and vain babblings, for they will increase unto more ungodliness." If men turn away from the full truth of Christ and take up with

profane and vain babblings, these things spread like a canker.

Then in 2 Tim. 3 it says, that "in the last days difficult times shall come," and, in verse 5, there would be found "a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof," and in verse 13, "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." There is the intensifying of evil as time goes on. Finally, in 2 Tim. 4: 3, "the time will come . . . when they shall turn their ears away from the truth and shall be turned unto fables." We seem to have reached this fourth chapter. In journeying through this Church period, from the day of Pentecost until the return of the Lord, a long period has elapsed, but these are the last days. One need hardly stop to speak of it, but it is unquestionable that people are turning their ears away from the truth, and what they offer us in the place of the truth is "fables." We marvel sometimes to see the writings and hear of the speeches of the cleverest men of today in the Christian profession; we marvel that they descend to such profanities and frivolous ideas, but they are turned from the truth to fables, and the professed people of God love to have it so.

Now, in these two epistles to Timothy, what has struck me is this, that a great deal seems to be connected with Ephesus, and the teaching of Paul, which reaches its highest unfoldings in the epistle written to the Ephesian saints. In order to see what I mean, will you turn to the 1 Tim. 1: 3. "I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus . . . that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine." We shall see in a moment what doctrine it was they had received; but he wrote these words to Timothy, who was his own child in the faith, and who was true to him, of whom he wrote, "I have no man like-minded." He was willing to part company with this close follower and imitator of him, and to leave him at Ephesus, because he saw the coming in of that which would corrupt the very best bit of Christian work we find in the New Testament. Then a little further on, in 1 Tim. 1: 10, 11, of that chapter he speaks of the "sound doctrine according to the glorious Gospel (the Gospel of the glory), of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust." Further in 1 Tim. 4: 16, he says to Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." That is, Timothy, by personal continuation in that teaching which he had received from the apostle, would not only be preserved himself in the midst of all the growing corruption, but would become an instrument in the hands of the Lord for delivering others from it too. Then, see 2 Tim. 1: 15. Time had elapsed between the first and the second epistles, not much perhaps, but Paul draws attention to the fact that by this time, beside those who were teaching evil doctrines, the whole of the saints in Asia had turned away from him. They were giving up the truth as he presented it at Ephesus. Again, in 2 Tim. 2: 2, it says, "The things that thou hast heard of me, the same commit thou to faithful men, that they may be able to teach others also." Even then there had come in the necessity to call for faithful men.

Now, if you are going to have faithful men, they must be faithful to something. I have suggested that at the back of all he says in the first and second epistles, you have the doctrine or ministry of the apostle as unfolded in all its breadth and length in his epistles, and crowned by the blessed truth embodied for us in the epistle to the Ephesians. In order to test what there is around us we need to have some definite understanding, more or less large, according to our measure, as to what this teaching of the apostle was. I would just like to refer briefly to the stages in which the truth of God has been unfolded to us, as written by Paul in Romans, Corinthians and Ephesians. I hope not to weary you. In the epistle to the Romans you have the individual brought out from this sinful world, his guilt covered, and propitiation made so that he can be brought to God in a manner suitable to the divine glory. You have him set up in this world for the will of God, and brought to know God in such a way that, not only is there peace and deliverance, but the will of God becomes a positive delight to his heart. Beloved fellow-Christian, is there not a danger of our wasting a lot of time, and squandering a great part of our

lives in doing our own will because we do not understand God's will, and because our hearts are not definitely and intelligently committed to it. I commend the epistle to the Romans to everyone that wants to get on in the things of God. Therein you have the laying of the foundation in the soul of the believer of the holy work of God. Note that first of all, the individual is blessed and set here for the God's will. Then at the end of the epistle, we are introduced to the fact that we, being many, are one body. The subject is not opened out, but the fact is stated in the way of an illustration. It shows we are not all alike, and it is not intended that we should be; but every one — in that mould in which the grace of God has cast him — is to be here definitely and positively in the will of God. This adjusts us in our relations as responsible men, living in this world; the one thing that governs our life and conduct is the will of God.

In the epistle to Corinthians, the very first verse links on with the preceding epistle in this way, that Paul is an apostle by the will of God. But he talks in this epistle not exactly of individual, but of collective responsibility — collective responsibility viewed in connection with the locality in which each one of us lives. Let me turn to 1 Cor. 1: 1, 2, because it may be important in connection with our subject of this afternoon. "Paul . . . unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Lord, both their's and our's." I suppose that it is all based upon the truth which we find in Romans. But notice again, "With all that in every place, etc." Locality is before his mind; but not only Corinth. The instructions given in this epistle were not given only to the Corinthians, not only to Christians in that locality, but apply equally to every locality wherever there are Christians. Moreover, they are to, "all that call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Lord," in that locality — that is, they are not addressed to any select number only, any tiny community, any part of the Church of God; but the whole church of God in any locality; all Christians in the town or city are instructed according to what we have in these two epistles to the Corinthians. Thus no one can say, "This is out of date." Jesus Christ is Lord still. He abides, thank God, and all that is committed to His keeping is in safe keeping. The testimony is hid in the ark and nothing can take it out; the standard is irreducible. Wherever Christians are, in that locality these instructions hold good. In a double way uniformity is to be secured in the administration of the Assembly; namely, first by the written instructions of the apostle, inspired as he was by the Holy Ghost, which remain to us for our guidance down to the end; and, second, it is to be secured by the unchangeable and universal Lordship of Christ; we call on the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. I think this important in connection with our subject this afternoon for this reason; the idea of several independent assemblies in one city is very widely held; and perhaps increasingly held, and is attractive to many people because of the way in which they escape exercise the one with the other. The result is a spirit of independency which is gravely opposed to the maintenance of that fellowship into which our faithful God has called us (see verse 9). The epistle is directed to every locality where there are Christians, and to all the Christians in that locality, so that that which is instruction for one meeting in a city is instruction for one meeting in a city. They are united by one common Lordship for all matters of administration.

This applies to binding and loosing also. Now we are in days of brokenness, and we cannot get back to the re-constitution of that which, outwardly at least, has tumbled to pieces, but if we are to be faithful men this is what we are to be faithful to. I fear many drop out of testimony in regard of that very thing, and that there is not that subjection to the Lordship of Jesus, not that attention to the instruction of the apostle which the Spirit is here to produce.

In Corinthians, then, you get instruction for the saints in connection with the locality in which they stand. Wonderful it is to study all the detail of it; but — not to linger over it — turn to the

Ephesian epistle. It is different from Corinthians in this way, that it speaks of what Christ is, and what the Assembly is, according to the counsels and purpose of God. That is not its local order and administration, seen to be governed by the written Word and revealed will of the Lord; rather is it the viewing of the Church of God from the standpoint of God's eternal counsel and that which He has wrought in the saints in view of it. I will briefly refer to one or two things that seem to be salient features in it, so as to help in a more detailed study.

The Epistle to the Ephesians is the crowning ministry of the apostle Paul; is the crowning ministry of the apostle Paul; he unfolds to us there the counsel and purpose of God. He says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," etc. Observe carefully the Name of the One with whom the blessed God connects Himself in Ephesians 1: 3. The central thought in that wonderful name is, of course, Jesus. We know Him. Have we not often sung, "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believers ear"? Here it is not exactly in our ear; we are introduced in this verse to, "the God and Father" of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not so much what we think of Jesus, but what God thinks of Him and what God has set forth in Him. In Acts 2 we are told, "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ." Both His Lordship and His Christhood are brought into view when we use the full name, the Lord Jesus Christ. I ask fellow-Christians not to use that name indifferently and thoughtlessly, but seek to consider what is unfolded in it; viz., that the One who bore the Name of Jesus here is now exalted by God's right hand is made both Lord and Christ. It was the sphere where He is thus owned on earth into which those, on the day of Pentecost, were introduced. By their baptism they came under the Lordship of Jesus and into that circle where the fulness of blessing connected with His Christhood was available for them. This Person is the One in connection with whom God now speaks. His eye is upon the One who, in His life and death here, and in heavenly glory now, is found covered with pure gold; in every place and circumstance, and under every condition, in absolute suitability to the glory of God. He, and not Adam, is the One in whom we see the divine pleasure He is the One upon whom the eye of God can turn with unchanging delight, and in whom the testimony of God is abidingly preserved This speaks to our hearts; we are encouraged, and having to share God's delight in Him. God, then, is presented here as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ This I commend to you as the first great theme. With His eye upon that holy and blessed, and now glorified One, it is as though God turns round and says, What can I withhold? What is there that I may not do in connection with Him? The apostle, in intelligent response to that which God had bestowed, says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." The heart of God is opened without reserve, and all the wealth and resources of God in grace are opened too, so that every spiritual blessing is unreservedly poured out upon us and secured for us because God loves Jesus. It accounts for everything you find in the epistle.

Now, when you come to look at what follows, because of our being in Him, it is impossible to compass all the glories of Christ that are referred to. You turn your eye on a clear night to the sky and you see some stars that are unquestionably prominent They are visible by their own light to the naked eye, and you can distinguish them. But you turn your eye on the milky way, and there is such a collection of glories that the mind cannot conceive their number. You cannot possibly speak of everything in detail. But here and there are great constellations that stand out and our eye notes them In connection with Ephesians you get a milky way of celestial glories opened out in connection with the counsels of God and the delight of God in Christ. However to look at just one of them, see verse 9. After speaking of the blessing God has bestowed, he says, "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will," etc. That is, the second great theme, that comes out in this epistle, the Headship of Christ. First of all, the fact that God has found a Man in whom everything is suitable to His glory and in connection with whom His heart has found rest and perfect complacency, and on account of whom He

can open His heart in immeasurable blessing; next Christ is referred to and distinguished as Head over all things in heaven and in earth We must distinguish between "Christ" and "the Christ." Some of our black Central African friends used to marvel when we told them that the same sun which shone in their country shone in our distant land of Europe. Said one to me, when journeying from village to village. "I cannot make the sun out — it seems to rise in a different direction every day," he could not place himself. He had no compass, and when the sun rose it seemed always to rise opposite from where he thought it would. He said, "I have always had the impression that every fresh place we went to had a sun of its own." After all, it was the same sun everywhere If we study the sun we see this ball of fire coming out of the horizon in the morning and taking its journey across the sky Some inquire as to its movement and constitution, its revolutions and its spots, and puzzle their brains over the material of which that sun is composed That is studying the sun by itself. Another may study it as it is known to be, the centre of a great solar *system*, this marvellous system in which we find ourselves. This earth is a planet in it; other planets revolve around it; the comets move in relation to it; the sun is the centre of this huge system. It is the same sun which we were considering before, when we were examining its own individual make-up; but then we considered the sun by itself. Now we think of it in relation to that whole system in which it moves, and as the centre around which the planets, etc, revolve If you think of Christ, He is always the same Person, but "Christ" personally may be studied in His own personal glory; but when you read of "the Christ" it seems to be more Christ in connection with the whole system that revolves around Him and the whole universal system of blessing. All things are to be headed up in the Christ in heaven and in earth. It includes the mystery of the Church and a great deal more beside, but if we read of "the Christ," it is Christ in relation to all that is His.

The third theme is the Spirit. That is in itself such a vast subject in the epistle that I can only commend it to your notice. If a person wanted a theological study he should sit down and make Ephesians his study for life. If you take up the subject of the Spirit of God alone in this epistle, the various themes suggested in connection with Him are a profound theological education. I hope our beloved brother who follows me this evening, may be able to set Christ before us in some such way, that our hearts may be drawn out to Him in bounding affection — but one just looks at the outline of things in Ephesians to see what it is we are to stand for, and to be faithful to, in second Timothy days.

Then, not only is there the Spirit of God, the competent Person to undertake the making good in our souls of everything God has substantiated in Christ, but you have the Church, presented in so many different ways in connection with Christ that, as I was saying, you see a milky way of glories, yet cannot speak of them all.

Another thing is power. In Ephesians 1 you find power toward us. The apostle prays to God that He might make known to the saints the greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ. All God's power wrought in Christ, and took Him from the lowest place in death, where He had gone that He might make it possible to fulfil the counsels of God, up to the right hand of God. That same power is in operation now in order to take us out of things here just as death and resurrection would take a man out of things here. The mighty power of God is to usward in order to give us this mighty uplift, that we might apprehend Christ in the place where He has gone. The church already sees Him there, Head over all things. The Church, which is His body, is to be enabled to be in full accord with Him, though still down here.

Then in Ephesians 3, the power is seen to be working in us. The Holy Spirit sets the Christ in the hearts of the saints, giving effect to all the counsels of God, enabling us to apprehend the breadth and length and depth and height of those counsels, and to know the love of the Christ which passeth knowledge, that we might be filled unto all the fulness of God.

Then, finally, in Ephesians 6, we have the mighty power from us, that can enable us to stand against the wiles of the devil.

In the midst of all the enemy's wiles and the saint's weakness, the apostle says to Timothy — this promising young man, eminently gifted, and desiring to get on, yet weeping because he saw the state of things around — "Thou, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus." It carries us back to the teaching of the apostle, to "the things which thou hast heard of me." We do not of course attain to teach others in five minutes. But would you not like, dear fellow-Christian, brother or sister, to be numbered among the faithful, faithful to the full light God has given us as to the Christ (because, of course, Christian sisters can be faithful too). Would you not pray to be numbered among these faithful ones who, while maintaining the whole truth which God has taught us, are able to teach others also? Right down to the very end we should be able to stand in all the good of that which is revealed, in spite of the slide-away on every hand. May God grant this to be the case with us all. Every line of the truth remains true in Christ, and we may give nothing up.