

GRACE MERCY AND PEACE FROM GOD

"O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding vain and profane babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called" (1 Tim. 6:20).

THE FIRST EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY

Although we know little of Timothy's personal life, he is the best known and closest of Paul's fellow-laborers. He was brought into the Truth by Paul and is referred to as Paul's "own son in the Faith." He joined Paul's company on Paul's second journey, and worked with him thereafter till the end of Paul's life.

His father was a Gentile, and Timothy was not circumcised, although he knew the Holy Scriptures from childhood.

His mother and grandmother were faithful believers, but his father and grandfather were not so mentioned. It would appear from this that faithfulness was on the female side of the family, and probably against difficulties. Timothy's mother may have been given in marriage to a Gentile by her father, against her own mother's wishes.

Timothy's choice to accompany Paul and field of labor in the ecclesias was apparently indicated by the Holy Spirit, for Paul says, in writing to him about it (1 Tim. 1:18) --

"According to the prophecies which went before on thee."

Paul, we remember, made three major journeys throughout the Roman Empire, preaching the Truth and establishing ecclesias. Timothy lived at Lystra, in East Asia Minor. When Paul arrived here on his second journey, Timothy joined him and traveled eastward with him through Asia Minor to Troas, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.

When Paul was driven out of Berea, Timothy and Silas stayed to continue the work. Paul called them to him to Athens, then sent them back to Thessalonica where the persecution was severe on the brethren, as Paul wrote to the ecclesia there (1 Thess. 3:2-3) --

"To establish you and to comfort you concerning your faith that no man should be moved by these afflictions."

Persecution and afflictions were the usual lot of the early believers when they joined the "sect everywhere spoken against."

And the youthful Timothy, soon after his call to the work, is sent back to the danger scene to be a source of courage and strength to the new believers.

Some have assumed, from Paul's exhortations to him to "stir up the gift" that was in him, and to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ," and to "let no man despise" his youth, that Timothy was timid and hesitant and lacking in missionary zeal and fervor for the work of the Truth. But surely the picture we get of him in this his earliest appearance in the work, shows him to be exceptionally faithful, zealous, courageous, and devoted.

The most we can fairly infer from Paul's exhortations to him is that he may have been over-reluctant to use his authority in relation to older brethren than himself, and that he, like all like even Paul himself -- felt the

weakness of the flesh and the need for encouragement to press forward in a dangerous and difficult and often lonely path.

A brother -- especially a young brother -- who is strongly motivated by love of the brethren and who recognizes his own human weakness, may be over-cautious about taking firm action against sin and error when firm action is called for.

We know how bro. Roberts, in his early days, experienced this agonizing conflict, and how bro. Thomas had to stir him to resolute action and separation from some who -- though nominally accepting the Truth -- were tolerating corruption of it. **Bro. Thomas could see clearly that just protesting against error is not enough.**

Jude gives us a command that should be one of our basic guidelines in all our prayerful efforts to defend and preserve the Truth (vs. 22-23) --

"Of some have compassion, MAKING A DIFFERENCE";

"And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh."

From Thessalonica, Timothy rejoined Paul at Corinth and stayed with him for the rest of the second journey.

He accompanied Paul on his third journey (which ended in Paul's arrest and being taken to Rome), three years of which was spent in Ephesus. He was with Paul on the return trip to Jerusalem, at the end of which a riot occurred in Jerusalem and Paul was imprisoned.

We have no record of Timothy while Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea, nor on the journey to Rome. He appears again with Paul in Rome -- part of the time, at least, a prisoner himself for Heb. 13:23 records that Timothy had been "set at liberty," as Paul himself was then expecting to be.

The first epistle to Timothy, where we find Paul had left him at Ephesus to set all things in the ecclesia in order there, appears to fit best into the period between Paul's two imprisonments. It is full of instruction and enlightenment about ecclesial affairs.

The second epistle to Timothy was clearly Paul's last epistle of all, for he is therein again imprisoned in Rome, and on the verge of execution, and he urgently calls Timothy to him.

Whether Timothy reached him in time we do not know, for this second epistle is the last we hear of either Paul or Timothy. There the record ends.

Of Timothy's value to Paul and of the difficult conditions under which Paul worked, we learn in Phil. 2:19-21 --

"I trust to send Timothy shortly unto you... I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state, for all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."

Would he have to say the same of us? Do we leave the labor to others, while we pursue our own comfort and material advantage? Let each of us ask himself this honestly and frankly -- and DEMAND an answer.

Or would he find us walking in true wisdom, realizing the emptiness and briefness of present possessions and interests, and dedicated to God's work, laying hold of ETERNAL treasure, that fadeth not away?

Paul's first epistle to Timothy is all about his work in the ecclesia at Ephesus. He opens with a prayer for Timothy's spiritual well-being (1 Tim. 1:2):

"Unto Timothy: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

THESE ARE REAL THINGS; MORE REAL THAN ANYTHING TO DO WITH OUR PERISHING, DAY TO DAY EXISTENCE.

This is perhaps the most vital verse in the whole epistle. All the rest is important, detailed instruction about various things. But this is the actual key to life or death --

"Grace, mercy, and peace -- from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

If we have this, we have everything: nothing else really matters or is important. If we do not have this, then no other possession in the world, or the world itself, would be of any value to us.

"Grace, mercy, and peace from God."

A few from among mankind have this supreme blessing: the vast majority do not.

"**GRACE**" -- the favorable attention, and love, and care, and comfort and guidance from God toward us. To come within the scope of His glorious light -- to be accepted as part of His chosen family, constantly overshadowed by His angelic protection.

This grace is extended without partiality to all who, in Truth, yield themselves entirely to Him, and ONLY to such. God makes no exceptions, plays no favorites. Just holding certain beliefs, and going to the meetings, and being technically "in the Truth" is not enough. We must give all to Him, holding nothing back. This must overshadow and dominate everything in our lives -- all our waking moments.

Then, and then ONLY, we enter into the glory of the grace of God.

"**MERCY**" -- the overlooking, in loving understanding, of all our shortcomings and weaknesses and failures and ugliness and fleshliness -- IF we, like Paul, agonize to repudiate them and be free of them.

TO obtain the mercy of God, the most important requirement is to recognize to its fullness our own absolute NEED for mercy -- our utter helplessness and miserableness without it. God is the essence of all holiness and purity and perfection. We are weak, ignorant, unclean mortal creatures seeking His exalted fellowship.

And, related to this, the more we recognize our own need for mercy, the more merciful we should be toward the faults and weaknesses of others --

"Love beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things and thinketh no evil; love covereth a multitude of sins."

This does not mean ignoring or excusing or condoning what is wrong, any more than a good doctor ignores disease or neglects treatment or won't use the knife, just because he is too "kindhearted."

TRUE love and TRUE mercy are always deeply concerned with correcting what is wrong.

Rather it means that our attitude toward the erring should always be fellow-feeling and understanding and deep and prayerful concern for their ultimate well-being. Always ready -- not to condemn -- but to help and encourage and forgive --

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

MERCY DOES NOT INTERFERE WITH DUTY AND OBEDIENCE TO COMMANDS.

Commands tell us to separate from persistent error, in order to preserve the health of the body and the soundness of the Faith. We have no choice, if we are faithful. But it must be done kindly and sorrowfully, not harshly or self-righteously --

"In the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted"

"And **PEACE**." Peace is not stagnation: not merely a dull and uneventful relief for the elderly and tired of life. Peace is essential for all -- young and old -- though we may not realize it.

Peace is the basic blessing we all need most, if we are God's.

It only comes through the grace and mercy of God. Peace is an impervious mental shield against all fears and disquietudes. Peace is perfect, relaxed harmony and tranquility of mind and spirit. Peace is primarily "peace with God" --

"We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

To have peace with God makes all other conflict harmless and unimportant. It can only come with complete, undivided dedication to one supreme object of life, for peace is essentially oneness and undividedness.

It is not freedom from external conflict: that's not important. It is freedom from INNER conflict. Jesus said, just before the terrible suffering of his crucifixion --

"Peace I leave with you: my peace I give unto you":

"In the world ye shall have tribulation; but in me ye SHALL have peace";

"Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

And Paul, chained and in prison for the sake of the Gospel, tells the Philippian brethren to take everything to God in prayer, and assures them that in so doing --

"The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, SHALL keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ."

"I besought thee to abide at Ephesus, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (1:3).

This is Timothy's first and principal duty at Ephesus -- the preservation in the ecclesia of true doctrine. Paul was always deeply and actively concerned with the preservation of the Truth and suppression of error in the Body. He fully realized this was the foundation upon which all else must be built.

"Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than godly edifying" (v. 4).

This is a very important distinction that must be borne in mind in all our studies, for it means the difference between success and failure.

It is not enough just to study the Word of God: we must study it with a purpose -- and we must study it with the right purpose: to learn God's ways and will, so we may draw closer to His requirements and manifest the beauty of holiness in our lives.

There are many side-issues and dead-ends and unanswerable problems that we can ardently pursue that just "minister questions" rather than "godly edifying."

We must consciously concentrate on getting the practical lesson and instruction for ourselves -- the guidance that will change US more and more from fleshly to spiritual.

Some study the Bible all their lives and become very proficient in it, but it never changes their character or way of life. The true purpose of the Word, says Paul in the second epistle, is for --

"Reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." He says the same here (v. 5) --

"The end -- the purpose, the WHOLE REASON -- for the commandment is love, a pure heart, a good conscience, and a genuine faith."

All God's Word is to develop us -- personally and individually -- in these characteristics. To get side-tracked, or as he says in verse 6, to "swerve" from this is "vain jangling" -- noise and effort without purpose.

"Desiring to be teachers of the Law" (v. 7).

The Law of Moses is meant. Reverting to the forms and bondage of the Law seems to be the principal problem that troubled the ecclesias from the beginning, and we see the development of this deadly tendency in its fulness in all the ecclesiastical rituals and structure of the Catholic church.

We, too, must ever be on guard against ritualism and technicality to the detriment of the true spirit of love and personal holiness.

Paul says (v. 9), that the Law was not for the righteous, but for the lawless and disobedient. As he told the Galatians who were being similarly led astray, the Law of Moses is not the way of life.

The Abrahamic Covenant is the way of life. The Law was added "because of transgression" (that is, the Law was "for the unrighteous"), until the Seed of Abraham should come to whom the Abrahamic Covenant was made.

This leads Paul (vs. 11-17), to a consideration of his own deliverance from the same erroneous devotion to the Mosaic Law which had caused him to reject and oppose Christ and to persecute Christ's followers.

But in God's mercy, because he was sincere, he was shown the right way, and was given mercy and forgiveness as an example of Christ's goodness and kindness.

He concludes chapter 1 by emphasizing Timothy's responsibility to fight a good fight and to defend the true Faith and to separate from the ecclesia any teaching otherwise.

Beginning chapter 2 --

"I exhort that, first of all. . . "

-- note this especially --

"FIRST OF ALL, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks for ALL MEN."

Is that our attitude toward the world? -- true concern for them, and CONSTANT prayer? There is a danger that we tend to be too self-centered and narrow in our interests and affections, ignorant of, and ignoring, other people's needs and sorrows, wrapped up in our "specially-chosen" selves and writing off the world as hopeless.

If God is concerned with the sparrows that fall, and the young ravens that cry, certainly He is concerned with the people, as Paul says here (v. 4) --

"God will have all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the Truth."

This must be OUR concern, too, if we are His true children, and not hypocrites. It is so easy to self-righteously attend our own comfortable little meetings, and then spend the rest of our time on our own selfish, temporal interests and welfare.

We must get out of ourselves and keep before our minds the broad world picture: God is concerned with the world, and is working with the world.

The true children of God have no time for any personal nonessentials. Their hearts and minds and lives are FILLED with serving God and helping their fellowmen.

Paul does not just say "prayers" for all men, and pass on, but he stops to emphasize and elaborate --

"Supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks."

There is no sharp distinction of meaning between the first three, but clearly Paul is strongly stressing the range, and depth, and importance of the command. It is not just a cursory and passing mention in our own otherwise self-centered prayers as a select little group.

Our prayers for all men must be real, and earnest, and sustained, and run the whole range of "supplication" and "intercession" and "giving of thanks."

And why "giving of thanks" for all men? What does that mean? What is there to be thankful about in relation to "all men?"

It means we must, like the prophets of old, and above all, like Jesus himself, identify ourselves with the sorrows and burdens and problems of mankind, praying for them and thanking God on their behalf for the unappreciated blessings He pours on all alike, in the hope that for our sakes mercy and blessing may be extended more widely.

This matter of prayer is something very real and very important. Prayer is perhaps the strongest and most marvelous of all God's provisions. It is a way whereby a man can extend his influence for good far beyond his natural powers -- without limit -- into eternal things.

We are constantly told in the Scriptures of the power and importance of prayer. We have just experienced a very serious riot in Detroit, the worst the nation has known, with untold suffering and untold loss and destruction.

Would a deeper realization of our responsibilities, and a fuller fulfilment of our duties in this respect, have avoided or lessened this?

God has given us a tremendous instrument for good -- for the good of man. Are we using it to the fullest -- or are we too wrapped up in our own selfish unimportances?

Truly there is much to be learned from the Scripture, if we are to be accepted of God.

Of course, our primary and overwhelming concern for mankind is their eternal salvation; but present, temporal help and good is still an important aspect of the work of the Truth.

And prayer. Always prayer. The heart-felt, heart-rent supplication for the pitiful, purposeless miseries of God-ignorant mankind, vainly seeking a self-made peace and a non-existent, impossible happiness, tragically destroying themselves with their own blind "wisdom."

Chapter 2:9-15 concerns the position of sisters. Two points are strongly emphasized. First, modesty and reserve in dress and deportment, with inner rather than surface ornamentation. Secondly, silence in the ecclesia.

Men and women are very different in many ways. The modern world, in its godless stupidity, ignores this divinely attested fact. Each sex has its own special weakness and its own strengths. Each has its own special place and function in the Body of Christ.

To the extent a sister overstepped either of these divine instructions, to that extent she cheapens herself and lessens her true spiritual usefulness in the Body.

It is always wisdom to make sure we are well over on the safe side of any command -- to try to realize and conform to its spiritual purpose and value.

These are not merely arbitrary and restrictive commands. Rather they are to make sisters more fitted and more suited to the fulfillment of their own very real and very necessary part in the welfare and activity of the Body.

Sisters are freed from many things that burden brethren, that they may be better suited to accomplish other things as important, or more important, in God's sight.

Chapter 3:1-17: The qualifications of bishops, or elders (arranging brethren), and deacons (serving brethren). These qualifications, of course, are required in all brethren, but the presence of the required qualifications must especially be assured in all chosen to serve the ecclesia.

Verse 2: First of all, a bishop must be blameless -- that is, above reproach. Truly Solomon says, a little folly in him that is in reputation is like the stink of dead flies in good ointment.

A serving brother must avoid anything that could reflect on the Truth, or discourage his brethren, or cause the weak to stumble, or the evil to rejoice. All work in the Truth is to be aspired to in the true spirit of serving God most fully and acceptably, but such work and positions have great added responsibilities.

The qualifications given, as best their true meaning can be determined, are these: --

Vigilant: wide awake, watchful -- discerning and aware -- concerned for needs and dangers.

Sober: grave, self-restrained and self-controlled: not excitable or impulsive or flippant or silly.

Orderly: decent and correct, well-mannered, courteous, considerate of others.

Hospitable: literally, a "lover of strangers": one who is happy and eager to care for others.

Able and ready at all times to teach: enthusiastic in the Word.

Not quarrelsome or argumentative, but conciliatory and understanding.

Not concerned with material things: heedless of self.

Patient, meek, and gentle.

Having a good reputation among outsiders -- that is, having established a consistent public record of reliability and pure living.

Ruling his own house wisely and well.

These are God's DIRECT COMMANDS, and it is vitally important that we weigh them fully when selecting serving brethren, or desiring to be serving brethren.

Chapter 4 is related throughout and deals with the contrast between self-imposed rules of physical self-denial and obsession with physical exercise, and true spiritual exercise and development of the whole man unto godliness through study of and obedience to the Scriptures.

It is easy to get these things out of proportion -- to be obsessed with physical well-being to the neglect of the infinitely more vital spiritual growth and development and well-being.

Physical health, no matter how well attended to, is only good for a few short mortal years. Soon the grave claims the best kept mortal bodies. But spiritual health, diligently pursued, is doubly profitable -- it is good for eternity, and it will also teach us wisdom and gain us divine care for the present existence.

"Commanding to abstain from meats" (v. 3).

There are all sorts of arbitrary self-denials which gender pride and self-satisfaction, and are directly contrary to the true spirit of praise and thankfulness that recognizes God's loving hand in His provisions for man.

As usual, we see again in the Great Apostasy -- the Catholic Church -- the full development of these various human theories against which Paul struggled --

"Forbidding to many, and commanding to abstain from meats which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving."

The close of the chapter is the true picture of self-discipline and self-development --

"Give attention to reading."

To reading what? There can only be one possible answer in the case: the Scriptures. Let us mark this well. Here again it is the difference between life and death --

"Give attention to reading."

Don't just read, but "give attention" (v. 13) --

"Meditate on these things."

Keep them uppermost in your attention -- train your mind to center on God and on His Word at every opportunity, ALL day -- "Give thyself WHOLLY to them," he says (v. 15).

It must be a consistent way of life -- and surely it is obvious this is the only wise and reasonable course! We are dealing with the glorious things of eternity and our possible relation to them -- if by any means we gain that great prize.

Could any course therefore be more foolish than to make anything less than the FULLEST EFFORT WE CAN to succeed?

Surely world events are crying out to us how insecure present things are and how close the end is upon us! Let us be sure we are -- for the brief time left -- found watching and working.

"Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father, and the younger men as brethren -- the women as mothers and sisters" (5:1-2).

The relationship in the Truth is a close, personal, family relationship -- that is, it should attain to the mutually affectionate and tender ideal that family relationship should be, though often sadly is not.

Relationship in the Truth is not a cold, impersonal, critical business or mere technical relationship. There MUST be a deep, personal, living feeling and closeness.

If there is, the necessary mutual reproof and correction will be gently offered and lovingly accepted. Pointing out where we feel others are wrong is often necessary and often a duty. Done in the right spirit, it is an evidence of love and care.

BUT -- it is one of the hardest, if not THE hardest, thing to do RIGHT -- in the Spirit and not in the flesh. Fleshly fault-finding comes so easily and naturally to all.

First of all, we should so live all the time, and have such a continuous and strong relationship of affection and understanding among us, that reproof could be given and received with perfect freedom in the spirit of love. This is an ideal never fully attained but earnestly to be striven for.

Chapter 5:3-16 is about widows. It is very interesting and has a practical bearing on today's problems. How should the aged and dependent be cared for?

The emphatic over-all teaching of this portion is that, generally speaking, it is a private and not an ecclesial matter.

Well-meaning individuals may feel this should be ecclesially organized and undertaken on a large and official manner. We see this trend among those who copy the world's ways.

But all the emphasis and force of Paul's words here is on restricting any ecclesial or organized participation, except in very special circumstances, and all in the direction of commanding and enforcing individual responsibility.

And surely in the light of what we see and hear of well-meant activities in this direction today contrary to Paul's commands, we can see not only the scripturalness of the commands but also the wisdom.

Three times he stresses this basic principle -- verses 4, 8, 16. This is the authority and wisdom of the Spirit speaking.

Paul says it is acceptable for "widows indeed" -- those with absolutely no one who should care for them -- to be taken on as a regular ecclesial responsibility, but EVEN THEN only with several rigid and demanding restrictions (vs. 9-10) --

"Let not a widow be taken into the number under three score years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works: if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed EVERY good work."

What of others who are equally in need, but do not so qualify?

The general and plentiful and consistent instruction of the Scriptures concerning love and care for others, especially those of the Household would adequately take care of all needs in a Body that is truly and spiritually alive. The vital divine command to ALL is --

"He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none, and he that hath meat let him do likewise."

All who are TRULY in the Truth will not only be willing, but thankfully happy and EAGER to do so, as children of a bountiful Father. For those not of this enlightened and spiritual disposition, God has nothing to offer. "As a man soweth, so shall he reap."

Institutionalized charity is a cold and humiliating and depersonalized thing. Individual and private love and care is a beautiful, mutually-blessing bond of perfectness. Officially organized schemes have great dangers, great problems, and great disadvantages.

We must be guided by the Spirit's teaching, whether we see its wisdom or not.

But we often can see the wisdom, especially if we first submit in humble faith. In this case we can clearly observe at present many ill-effects from schemes that ignore the Spirit's teaching --

Encouragement of shirking personal responsibility:

Constant pressuring for money to keep ambitious schemes afloat, like the world's churches;

Unhappy and unsatisfactory conditions of the inmates:

The constant danger of an ever-growing centralized bureaucracy, and an organization held together more and more by its external structure and less and less by the Truth.

There is one very striking verse in the instruction about widows (v. 6) --

"She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth."

Life is given to man for ONE REASON ONLY -- to serve and glorify God -- to give Him pleasure and to be useful in His eternal purpose.

Pleasure in the abstract is not of itself wrong. There is, in fact, infinitely more true pleasure and enjoyment, and satisfaction in the Way of Life than the way of death. David said of that glorious condition to which he looked forward in faith --

"In Thy presence is fullness of joy, and at Thy right hand are pleasures forevermore."

But Paul is talking about self-pleasing as a motive, compared with God-pleasing as a motive.

It is the motive and the motivation that determines whether our service is spiritual or carnal.

If we serve God simply to get ourselves into the Kingdom and enjoy its pleasure, this is merely a higher and disguised form of the same old selfishness.

But if we forget ourselves, and serve God out of the joy of love and gratitude and worship and devotion we shall find all other things are added unto us.

Pleasure sought selfishly is never found. It only comes as a by-product of love and service.

Chapter 6 is all related, though the relationship may not be immediately apparent. It is about slavery, and godliness, and contentment, and riches, and the good fight of faith, and finally and above all, defending and preserving that glorious treasure entrusted to our care.

The common theme throughout is that present conditions and circumstances -- either of handicap or privilege -- from the extremes of abject slavery on the one hand to abundant riches on the other -- are utterly unimportant, and not to be either rebelled against or sought. Life is too short.

The important thing is GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT. Not just godliness, not just contentment, but godliness with contentment. A faithful life; and a joyful, peaceful, thankful mind.

This chapter is the complete opposite -- the complete rebuttal -- of the common, natural philosophy of life. The natural mind rebels against slavery and poverty, and desires freedom and material possessions. This is the highest ideal of the natural mind -- the "Great Society."

The Scriptures do not condone slavery. But neither do they seek to destroy it, any more than they seek to directly destroy any others of the vast multitude of inequities that make up natural human society.

The purpose of God is, at the present time, concerned with something on an entirely different and vastly higher plane -- PREPARING A PEOPLE FOR ETERNITY BY ADVERSITY.

And, in God's wisdom, slavery and poverty are sometimes part of the general, evil, human background that God is using to develop character and shape His determined ends.

Slaves are told to count their owners worthy of all honor. This is galling to the pride of the flesh, but as the command of God, faithfully obeyed, it is strengthening to the spirit.

Anything that contributes to pride and self-satisfaction -- possessions, position, knowledge, power, prestige -- hinders in the Way of Life.

Anything that contributes to humility and self-abasement and recognition of weakness and need -- slavery, poverty, low position -- helps in the Way of Life.

To the "wise" of the world, this is incomprehensible folly.

If the owners are believers, slaves are still to accept the condition, and do faithful service, not to expect release because their owners are their brethren. The Gospel was not meant to disrupt or reform human society as such. Any tendency in that direction, however agonizingly well-meant, would divert and dissipate the power of the Gospel among men. Therefore, he says (vs. 3-5) --

"If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness,"

"He is proud, knowing nothing, doting about questions,"

"Supposing that gain is godliness."

What does this phrase mean -- "supposing that gain is godliness" -- and what connection does it have with the general line of exhortation about slavery?

It is this: they confused the aim and purpose of the Gospel -- which is godliness -- with the aim of present human betterment and improvement of social conditions. This is sacrificing an eternal betterment for a mere temporal one.

Their course, though well-meant, would at best bring only present, external, material betterment; and in the endless upheaval and striving for present good, the eternal purpose would be confused and lost.

The basic principle involved is a vital one, and one we all need to learn lest we well-meaningly fall into the same diversion of effort and attention. It is, this --

Accept all outward conditions as they are -- evil and good -- and concentrate directly and continuously on the eternal, spiritual work of preparing a holy people.

The aspect of riches, into which he goes next, is the other side of the same picture. The natural desire and tendency is to accumulate money and possessions, for various real and supposed motives of "taking care of their own" or doing great and spectacular things for the Truth.

This, if we are not very careful, leads again to confusing gain with godliness.

God's work is primarily with the poor, and He chooses weak and poor instruments for the purpose that the glory may be of God and not of man. He sends the 30,000 home, that the 300 with Gideon may manifest THEIR faith and HIS glory in victory.

We must keep bringing ourselves back to this -- the simple, personal work of each individual, day after day -- not the great well-financed and well-organized schemes.

The Truth is a very simple, individual, personal thing -- passed on in joyful zeal from person to person -- radiated in personal example, personal dedication, personal holiness.

Look at the example of Christ. Look at the example of Paul. This was the living power that swept the Roman Empire in the early centuries, and this is the work we have to carry forward each individual one of us, in this our brief day. "O Timothy" and the exhortation is for all --

"Keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called."

-- of which there is sadly so much today, in the Body as well as outside.

(Taken from "Be Ye Transformed" Volume 1 pages 369-384 by Bro. G. Growcott)