

James Philip Bible Readings

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THE FIRST
EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY

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THE FIRST EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY

(These Notes were first printed in August 1966)

The two epistles to Timothy, and that to Titus, were written towards the close of Paul's life and ministry, after the close of Acts. It is likely that the Apostle was released from his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28) and was able to continue his work for a year or two before being re-arrested. Coming at the end of his missionary career, they reflect both Paul's own maturity of character and outlook, and also the more settled life of the Christian Church after the first flush of Pentecostal grace and power. Throughout there is a marked emphasis on Christian character, and on conscientious and consistent behaviour in the midst of the growth of dangerous heresies in the realm both of doctrine and behaviour. This emphasis is made in the context of the instructions he gives to his two young associates about matters of procedure they are to follow in the churches for which they are responsible.

1) 1:1-2

We can usually learn a great deal from Paul's introductory greetings, and this one is no exception. He calls himself an apostle 'by the command of God' (1). This is a characteristic emphasis, rendered necessary in some of his other epistles by the constant challenge to his authority. Here it serves to remind us of the constraint of God that lay upon him in the work of the gospel. If we are tempted to think that this kind of authority is not much in evidence in the Church today, we should realise that it needs first of all to be where the command of God can be heard. Perhaps the Church as a whole is not near enough to God to hear His voice speaking like this. Remember, it was after Isaiah was cleansed that he heard the voice of God saying, 'Whom shall I send...?' We should note also that Paul speaks of 'God our Saviour'. This is an unusual expression, but it emphasises an important truth, namely that it is in fact God Himself Who, in the Person of His Son, is our Saviour. It was God, in Christ, Who reconciled the world unto Himself. This is the answer to those who think the biblical doctrine of the Atonement represents God as a bloodthirsty, vengeful Jewish deity who demands propitiation for sin at the cost of the death of Jesus, and portrays Jesus as somehow persuading an unwilling God to forgive sin. Not so, Paul indicates in this phrase. It is God Himself that makes the propitiation. In Christ, He Himself grapples with the enormity of sin, taking it to His Own bosom to destroy it. It is God Himself Who provides the sacrifice for sin. These words are the mature fruit of Paul's long theological insight. How much they say to us, and how deep their roots!

2) 1:1-2

Timothy was Paul's own son in the faith. We first hear of him in Acts 16:1-3, which see. The likelihood is that he was converted during the visit to Lystra Paul paid on his first missionary journey in AD 48/49. If at the time of the writing of this epistle Timothy was still a young man (cf 4:12, 'Let no man despise thy youth') - this would be at least after AD 62 and probably nearer AD 65/66 - then he must have been very young indeed when he became a believer, it may be just a boy. This should encourage those who work with the young in Sunday School and Bible Class to remember that God's ideal is for children so to be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord that they will come early to a knowledge of salvation. Timothy was instructed from childhood in the Scriptures and in the things of God (see 2 Timothy 1:5, 3:15ff) and the disciplines of the home joined the disciplines of the fellowship in which he was reared to produce in him a genuine and living faith which grew and developed steadily until he was in a position to enter the glad service of the gospel. Why should it be supposed that a period in the 'far country' is inevitable for the children of believers before they finally 'settle down' in the Christian faith? When this does happen, surely the responsibility must lie with the home and the fellowship, not with the provision of God.

'Mercy' is added to 'grace and peace' in the apostolic benediction here only and in 2 Timothy of all Paul's epistles, as if, nearer eternity, the consciousness of the need for mercy is all the greater; or perhaps with reference to Timothy's difficulties in Ephesus (3) he invokes for his son in the faith the mercy that had sustained him in all his own travails.

3) 1:3-4

The NEB and RSV renderings of 3 make it clearer than the AV does that Paul had already urged Timothy, and was not repeating that admonition, to remain on at Ephesus. It would seem that for some reason the young Timothy was tempted to leave that place. What lies behind this? It looks as if Timothy had become much discouraged at the state of affairs in Ephesus - the heresy, the unfaithfulness – and was disposed to withdraw, but Paul says, 'Stay on'. He would scarcely have said this, if there had not been doubt or hesitation in Timothy's mind about staying. If this be the correct interpretation of the situation, then two important issues are raised. The first is this: the temptation to pull out of a difficult and discouraging situation may be very real and understandable, but it is not thereby the right thing to do in such circumstances; and this applies equally to a difficult mission station or a difficult office or workshop. Paul says, 'Stay on!' The ultimate consideration is not whether or not things are difficult, with awkward and cantankerous colleagues on the station, or no other believers in the office, but whether the Lord has placed us there. If He has placed us there, we are not at liberty to leave, on any consideration, except He Himself should make it plain. We must not ask for easier tasks, but rather pray to be made stronger men and women, and more effectual witnesses. Why, after all, should we expect an easy time?

4) 1:3-4

The second issue raised in these verses is the still more agonising one of whether, because of 'other doctrines', heresy and unfaithfulness, a man should 'pull out', and withdraw and dissociate himself from a fellowship. And Paul says, 'Stay on!' This is of wide import for evangelical thinking today. The question is whether one is justified in withdrawing if heresy creeps in, or unfaithfulness. In the missionary situation of our own denomination, for example, it is a great and major tragedy that there have been so many who have withheld themselves from foreign mission work with the Church of Scotland and gone to other societies because of this unwillingness to stay on. What an impoverishment it has brought to the Church! How are we ever to correct false doctrine within the Church if all who could do so with effect withdraw from it? It is possible to 'charge some that they teach no other doctrine' only from within, not from the outside.

Fables (4) probably have reference to Jewish traditions added to Old Testament stories. Genealogies may refer either to Old Testament lists of names to which wild allegorical interpretations, purely fanciful, were given (there is always a tendency in the carnal mind to find in Scripture what is not there, and miss what is!); or to the early heresy of Gnosticism, which invented and introduced a whole system of intermediate beings - angels or 'aeons' - standing between Christ and sinners, mediating between Him and them. Paul scotches this idea more fully in 2:5 (which see). The great test of such fanciful interpretations is, 'Does this build up in godliness?' Why should we be bogged down with speculative trivialities, asks Paul, when everlasting splendours await due training and preparation? Why indeed! This is a question that must embarrass all fruitless speculators and titivators of divine truth.

5) 1:5

The AV rendering of this verse scarcely brings out the richness and significance of what Paul is saying here. Of the modern translations, that of J.B. Phillips comes nearest to the meaning: 'The ultimate aim of the Christian minister, after all, is to produce the love which springs from a pure heart...' Substitute 'ministry' here for 'minister' and the true meaning becomes plain. The reference first of all is to 'the charge that Timothy has to give' (Lock), but may be extended to include the whole scheme of salvation as preached in the gospel. Here, then, is what the Christian ministry is designed to produce - its grand fruit and fruition in the lives of men is love; and the means, so to speak, by which this is produced are - a pure heart, a good conscience, and unfeigned faith. This is an impressive statement and it provides a searching test both of the validity and the effectiveness of any ministry. This Paul sets over against the profitless speculation already mentioned in 4, and serves to remind us that doctrine is never meant merely to make us knowledgeable, but to make us godly. All knowledge must be converted into godliness. The progression - heart, conscience, faith - can be taken either way, with the thought of a living faith being the first-fruit of the preaching of the Word, purging the conscience and cleansing the heart; or, on the other hand, with the thought of the work of the gospel being to create in us a new heart, pure and clean, single and undivided, which leads in turn to that open willingness for all God's perfect will that means a good conscience. This in turn leading to a purity of faith that will be increased and nourished and made strong in the process. Such was the ministry that Timothy was to be exercising in Ephesus.

6) 1:6-7

In these verses, the contrast with what precedes them is complete. They speak of the barrenness and fruitlessness of dead orthodoxy. The word translated 'swerved' means 'not having aimed at', and makes us ask ourselves the challenging question, 'What are we aiming at in our spiritual lives?' Religious diversion (vain jangling) or moral and spiritual transformation? Do we come under the sound of the Word to be interested, or knocked into shape? Some nowadays, having been saved from the world of entertainment, are determined nevertheless to satisfy that side of their life through their religion, instead of allowing religion to make them! If a man is honest enough to face the faults and blemishes of his nature, temperament and character and come to the Word determined that it shall change him and make him into another man, nothing is surer than that he will be shattered and humbled in the process - but at the end of it he will be a man. This is the real issue.

The word 'desiring' in 7 has the force of 'ambitious striving', and reminds us of something that everyone who takes upon himself to speak in God's name has to be clear about in his heart - the motive for wanting to speak and teach. Is it for the honour and glory of God, or is it a secret desire for self-display, or a coveting of place? Of all human deceptions this is probably the most subtle and dangerous. Those who practise it are rarely aware of how deeply they are deceiving themselves, but their hearers generally are, for the living message does not come through such a ministry. However impressive it may sound, it misses the real point of the law (7b) which is moral and spiritual, not speculative and merely clever. Such men are blindly unaware that they have nothing to say.

7) 1:8-11

The misunderstanding of the law is a subject that repeatedly crops up in Paul's epistles, notably Romans and Galatians. Here, the apostle states the function of the law as being for the lawless and disobedient, and gives an impressive list (in line with the Ten Commandments, although not covering them all) of those who are the objects of the Law's abiding challenge. This echoes what he teaches in Galatians 3:19, where he says, 'The Law was added because of (or, in relation to) transgressions', that is, as a restraint against sin, and for its control, and as a revelation of sin, to bring men to a knowledge of their need of Christ. It is not therefore for the righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient. This means, when once the love of God comes to possess a man's heart, there is no longer any need to appeal to the Law's sanctions, for love is the fulfilling of the Law, and the believer is not under the Law but under grace. But this raises another matter. For who is righteous? There is none righteous, except One. The most righteous of men is also at the same time unrighteous, the believer is also at the same time an unbeliever, and therefore needs the Law as a restraint upon his unrighteous tendencies, and to hedge him up in his unbelief unto faith. Thus, even when he is most truly a righteous man and a believer, the sanction of the Law remains. Even though he does not need the commandment, it is still wrong for him to break it. And if he is tempted to break it, then he still needs it to control and restrain him. And when he is not tempted to break it, he delights to honour it. It is his pleasure. To him the Law is 'good' (the Greek word means 'beautiful'). Note that in 11 Paul finely relates the Law to the gospel. It is as if he were saying, 'This is how the gospel understands and interprets the Law'. Only thus can its proper function and purpose be discerned.

8) 1:12-13

The reference in 11 to the gospel committed to his trust prompts Paul to an expression of thanksgiving as he thinks of the wonder and mystery of his calling. His words could be rendered, 'I thank the empowering Christ Who counted me faithful and put me in the ministry'. Is it not wonderful that Christ should have committed His gospel and its propagation to sinful men? Was not this a hazardous thing to do? Ah, but for His Own empowering, it would be disastrous. But when He calls, He enables, and this is the abiding confidence of all whom He calls to the work. But Paul's thanksgiving is due to the special circumstances of his own call which was a source of wonderment and mystery to him because he was not only a sinful man, but a blasphemer and a persecutor. It was this that magnified the mercy of God in Paul's eyes.

But what does it mean that he obtained mercy because he 'did it ignorantly in unbelief'? At first glance this seems a dubious and even questionable assertion. How could Paul say that he persecuted the Church in ignorance? When he stood watching the martyrdom of Stephen, consenting to his death, was this ignorance? Did he act in ignorance when he persecuted believers even to strange cities and committed them to prison? Was there not deliberate malevolence in what he did? And does he mean that mercy is given only when sin is committed in ignorance, but not when committed deliberately? But Paul's statement is in fact analogous to our Lord's words on the Cross, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do', and this affords us a key to the problem. For in the deepest sense these men could not fully know what they were doing because in the foul deed they committed their minds were blinded by the god of this world (see 2 Corinthians 4:4). It is in this sense that their sin could be attributed to ignorance and unbelief, and for this reason therefore it was forgivable. Likewise, we conclude, Paul was the dupe and tool of Satan in the terrible persecution he led against the Church, and his sin, though great and terrible, was mercifully forgiven. But more of this in the next Note.

9) 1:12-13

What lies behind our consideration in the previous Note is the fact that there are two different elements in sin that require to be distinguished. On the one hand, there is that of human frailty and weakness, which calls forth the compassion and mercy of God. To be the dupe of the devil is to be an object of pity, and when we are, we never know in the fullest extent just how pathetic and miserable creatures we are. On the other hand, however, there is that in sin which is deliberate and malignant, and which does not spring from the weakness or sensual part of our nature, but is the mark of our revolt and rebellion against God. In Satan, sin is purely spiritual (in the evil sense), and unmixed with any frailty or sensual weakness; it is pure and utter rebellion. And this is why Satanic sin is unforgivable. But in men, sin is rarely, if ever, pure revolt, but generally mixed to a greater or lesser degree with sensual weakness, and for this reason it is forgiven. But the nearer to the satanic man's sin comes, the more dangerous and critical it is, since it approaches, so to speak, a point of no return, beyond which forgiveness becomes impossible. This is the sin against the Holy Spirit, about which our Lord speaks with such solemnity, elsewhere (Hebrews 10:26) spoken of as wilful sin. It may be that one reason why Paul calls himself the chief of sinners is that, looking back on his pre-conversion days, he realised just how near he had come to that dread point when his sin could no longer be said to contain any element of ignorance or blindness in it. If his rebellion and revolt had gone on much longer, it may well have come to this. Viewed thus, it should be clear that Paul has no thought of offering the plea of ignorance as an excuse for his sin. Ignorance can never be an excuse for guilt; but it does constitute a plea for mercy.

10)1:14-15

The thought of Christ's super-abundant grace in 14 reminds us of Paul's still more famous words in Romans 5:20, 'Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound'. This is certainly what he is indicating here, for what he says about God's grace is set in contrast to what he had been in his opposition to the gospel. We should notice also the order in which the words grace, faith and love stand. It is grace that produces and creates both faith and love in Christian experience. Indeed, these are the only indisputable evidence that grace has been at work in the soul, just as a new-born baby's cry is the evidence of life. Faith does not bring grace, but rather vice versa.

The 'faithful saying' in 15 is one of several found in the Pastoral epistles (see 3:1, 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11; Titus 3:8), and it is thought that these were credal statements in common use in the early Church, in much the same way as the Shorter Catechism is a collection of doctrinal statements used widely in the instruction of believers. There is a monumental simplicity about this 'saying' as it makes its categorical pronouncement on the meaning of Christ's coming into the world. It precludes, for example, the possibility of regarding Christ merely as a great Teacher or religious Leader. It is true that what Paul does here is to place a certain interpretation on the fact of Christ; it is true that to speak of Him as a Saviour and Redeemer rather than as a Teacher is to adopt a particular theory about Him. But this happens to be the biblical interpretation and the biblical theory, and therefore it is the only right one. It is this interpretation of Christ's coming, not any other, that constitutes the gospel, and that makes it a gospel. Nor are we at liberty to adopt any other alternative interpretation that diverges from the biblical one and still call it Christian! There is one interpretation of the coming of Christ that merits the name Christian, not many; and it is found in such statements as this that Paul makes here.

11) 1:16-17

There are two wonderfully encouraging thoughts in 16. First of all, in the reference to longsuffering (Christ's, not his own) what Paul means is this: 'Christ showed mercy to me, the chief of sinners, to make clear to all the world that there are no limits to His mercy and longsuffering grace. If such a one as I can be saved, then I will despair of no-one'. This is comfort and assurance not only to those who tend to despair of themselves, but also become discouraged in their praying for others. 'Remember Christ's longsuffering and patience to me', cries Paul, 'and pray on!' The second point has to do with the word translated 'pattern', which, the scholars tell us, means 'an incomplete sketch in contrast to the complete picture'. The idea conveyed is: All the evidence of sanctification we see in the apostle, the moral transformation, the Christlikeness of spirit, is but a rough sketch, a faint shadow of what will yet be in the eternal glory. This is a marvellously graphic way of saying that God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). It is little wonder that Paul breaks into doxology (17) at the thought he has just expressed. The contemplation of what Christ has done, is doing, and will yet do, is surely a sufficient incentive for praise and adoration! The language of this doxology is august and majestic, befitting its subject; befitting also the work of which Paul has just been speaking. It is the 'King of the ages' who will finally clothe the soul with immortality and imperishable honour and glory, but it will be His honour and glory spilling over, so to speak, and enveloping us, for heaven is all God and Christ, and to be clothed in Him is the ultimate beatitude.

12)1:18

The charge referred to here takes us back in thought to 5 which, it will be remembered, we translated thus: 'The aim of the Christian ministry is to produce...' The 'prophecies' were utterances made by Christian prophets in the fellowship (at Lystra) indicating for Timothy a fruitful and profitable future in the work of the gospel. It is clear that Paul took these as authentic and Spirit-inspired, and made them the basis both of his charge to Timothy and also of his exhortation to him to wage a good warfare, as if to say, 'This is what God has appointed for you, therefore rise to it and realise your destiny as a child of God'. Something of considerable importance arises from this, however. We are accustomed, and very properly, to speak of the necessity of a divine call to the work of the gospel. 'How shall they preach, except they be sent?' (Romans 10:15). But Paul here seems to indicate that such a call can come to a man through some Spirit-filled men saying to him, or of him, that in their conviction he is destined, 'cut out' for the work of the ministry. Is there a place, then, for the wise and discerning in a fellowship not only encouraging but actually pressing someone to enter the ministry? It is true that we must listen to no-one but God alone in matters of spiritual guidance, but what if God should choose to speak to us through other people? And what if He should in fact endue some in the fellowship with this gift for this purpose? Is there not something here that requires to be thought about very carefully?

13) 1:18-20

The charge given Timothy by Paul is in military terms. The Apostle, looking back on his life, calls it warfare, and gives it its proper name. Timothy is to wage a good warfare 'by' the prophecies, or 'in' them, as in Christian armour; they are to be his inspiration, constantly to be remembered and used as a spur to his endeavour, to enable him to be the best he could be. Faith and a good conscience (see 5) are almost equivalent here to the whole armour of God in Ephesians 6 (which see). Faith may be taken in both its senses, as 'the faith once delivered to the saints' and as that grace which enabled us to lay hold of the promise of God. Both belong together. To swerve from that sacred deposit of truth committed to us in the Scriptures will mean that faith will wax faint within us. Furthermore, faith is strong only when the conscience is clear and the heart is pure. It is as the influence and power of the blood of Christ goes ever deeper into the intricacies of our hearts that faith will rise within us. A spring of water will not bubble up freely and gush forth if it is checked with sludge and impurities. Furthermore, faith and a good conscience belong together. Conscience is, one might say, the rudder of the ship of faith, and when it is jettisoned, shipwreck is inevitable (19, 20). The danger this can bring to the soul is amply underlined in what the Apostle says of Hymenaeus and Alexander. To be delivered unto Satan seems clearly to be some kind of sentence of excommunication. This need not indicate anything final, indeed 20 suggests the opposite, for Paul shows it to be disciplinary in intent - 'that they may learn not to blaspheme'. But it is very terrible nevertheless, for it surely indicates that by our deliberate and continued sin and impenitence we may withdraw ourselves from, and cause to be withdrawn from us, the divine protection which preserves His own from the dread machinations and assaults of the devil (see 1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 John 5:16, 17; 1 Corinthians 11:30; Acts 5:1-11; Acts 13:11 for further instances of this solemn judicial enactment). How careful and earnest we should be to hold faith and a good conscience!

14)2:1-4

We may take what Paul says in these verses as being part of the charge committed to Timothy (1:18) and as one of the ways in which he is to wage a good warfare. We should not miss the significance of this priority given to prayer. Nor should we miss the distinction that is implied in the Apostle's words between what may be called 'direct' and 'indirect' prayer. The prayer for kings and those in authority is not that they might be saved (although it is also a duty laid upon us to pray for the conversion of our rulers - much do they stand in need of this!) but that we lead a quiet and peaceable life. That is to say, such prayer is designed to bring the restraints of God upon those in authority, that they will so govern as to give that measure of peace and order which will enable the work of the gospel to proceed with maximum effectiveness and the minimum of difficulty and obstruction. This is a very important consideration, and we require to distinguish this in our prayer life. There is prayer with the definite view of backing home the work of the gospel and bringing men to a saving knowledge of Christ; but there is also prayer in the sense that it spreads the canopy of divine grace over the whole human situation, keeping the forces of evil in restraint so that men may live in peace and quiet and honesty, and the possibility of godliness emerge in society. Far more emphasis should be given to this aspect of prayer than often is. This is the Church's function as 'the salt of the earth', as direct evangelism is its function as 'the light of the world', and the one should not be without the other. In this respect, it is not fanciful or arrogant to think that our country is all the better a place because the Church prays for those in authority over us.

15)2:1-4

It will be noticed that Paul makes a very marked emphasis on the word 'all' in these verses - 'all men' - 'all in authority' - 'all men to be saved', 'ransom for all' (6). There are two possible explanations of this striking repetition. One is that it may be a counteractive against one of the ancient heresies, Gnosticism, which spoke of a favoured few rather than all as being the object of the divine salvation. The other possibility is that what Paul has in mind is Jewish exclusivism, as if he were reminding his own people that God had called them, not to exclusivism, but to be a light to lighten the Gentiles. One cannot but be impressed with the universality of Paul's gospel, and in this connection it is necessary to mention at least the doctrine of limited atonement. This doctrine maintains that Christ died only for the elect, and not for all mankind, and that His atonement was therefore limited. What lies behind this assertion, which certainly, on the face of it, stands in contradiction to what Paul says here about a 'ransom for all' and about God Who 'will have all men to be saved', is the seemingly impossible and unthinkable alternative that would require to be accepted if limited atonement is not true, namely, that Christ's atonement would need to be regarded as ineffectual for some, i.e., those who refused to repent and believe the gospel. This, to those who hold limited atonement, is to cast doubt on the omnipotence and sovereignty of God. One understands this reasoning, of course, but it is open to the same criticism as that which leads men to holding the 'double decree' in predestination - the unbiblical doctrine that God predestines men to everlasting torment as well as to everlasting salvation. The mistake here is to apply logical categories where they are not strictly applicable. Paul stops short, in Romans 9, of drawing such a logical conclusion, and one could have wished that others had shown a similar restraint. The doctrine of limited atonement is, it would seem, a logical inference from certain plain biblical statements; but then, logic is not the ultimate criterion, and is seen not to be, when we read statements such as Paul makes in 4 and 6. To be the victim of one's logical processes is a common way of falling into error in the spiritual life.

16)2:5-6

The connecting particle 'for' makes this wonderful statement about the Mediator the ground of the prayer for all men that is enjoined in 1-4. It is because Christ gave Himself a ransom for all that all are to be the objects of believing prayer. It is typical of Paul's writings that he should utter such a tremendous truth almost incidentally, in making a point of another sort, and we should be grateful for this enriching habit of his. But now to the statement itself. Again there is probably in Paul's mind a concern to refute the teaching of Gnosticism which held that there were many mediating 'aeons' or powers between God and man, Christ being only one among many others. Gnosticism is not an issue for us today, but Paul's emphasis on the unique Mediatorship of Christ should serve to refute the errors of the Roman Catholic heresy of praying to the virgin Mary and to the saints, as if they could ever intercede for men and mediate between them and God.

A mediator, by definition, is one who stands in between two opposing parties, with the purpose of bringing them together and reconciling them. This is the work Christ performs in His death on the Cross, as a ransom for the sins of men. The controversy, for which His death is the sufficient and complete solution, is a double-sided one in which not only man stands in alienation from God, through sin, and guilty before Him, but also the divine wrath is kindled against him. Indeed, this latter is so incomparably more serious that the other is overshadowed. The blood of the Cross - Christ's mediatorial virtue - must therefore be seen to have a twofold reference, Godwards as well as manwards. It not only 'speaks' to man, in the sense that it takes his guilt away and reconciles him to God but - even more important - it 'speaks' also to the heart of God, turning His anger away, so that He can say, 'Your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more'. Just how the divine anger is turned away by the blood of the Cross will be the theme of the next Note.

17)2:5-6

Christ met a twofold problem in the death that He died on the Cross, in that there was a double liability involved in the sin that He bore. On the one hand, sin is transgression and violation of the divine law, and as such the penalty of the law must be exacted and paid to the full. On the other hand, sin is something more than this - it is an insult to the divine majesty, and this also must be dealt with, in any atonement that is real. A simple illustration here will help to make this clear. A thief breaks into my house and steals a valuable picture. The police are informed, and in due course the thief is arrested, tried, found guilty and sent to prison for his pains. In other words the law has been vindicated, its penalty having been imposed and exacted. But this in itself does not suffice to put matters right; it does not atone for 'make up for' - my loss. I want my picture back; and only when it is safely returned can I regard matters as having been put right. Here, then, are two distinct ideas - the punishment of the offence, and the repair of the injury; and both are necessary in order to put matters right. And it is so also in the spiritual realm. The offence of sin must be punished; but the repair of the injury to the divine majesty must also be done. As well as having His law vindicated, God wants His picture back, the lost image in which He created man and which sin has defaced. And the death Jesus died not only paid the penalty of sin, it also restored to God what sin had stolen from Him - a perfect manhood, lived without sin, and offered to God on the altar of Calvary. Thus all that had awakened the divine anger - the broken law and the loss of holiness - was dealt with once for all, the righteous peace was securely made. The atonement is the answer to sin for God first, and then for man. It is when God is finally at peace about sin that man can find rest and forgiveness.

18)2:7-8

The connection between these verses and what is said in 6 is surely clear. The good news of the divine ransom is to be borne witness to in all the world, and God Himself appoints His servants for this very task (7), and it is for this reason that men are to pray everywhere, in order that the word of salvation might have free course and be glorified (see 2 Thessalonians 3:1). Here, then, is the true apostolic succession, bearing witness to the work of the Mediator, to His substitutionary, atoning sacrifice, to the ransom price paid by His precious blood, to a plan laid in eternity and wrought out once for all in time. True succession has to do not with persons but with the message that is handed down. We should notice also the various offices which Paul is conscious of fulfilling in the will of the Lord. This reminds us that although it is clear in the Scriptures that God anoints specially some men for special work - e.g. evangelism - a man may more usually have several offices to fulfil in the work of the gospel. Men called to full-time work in the ministry have to be their own evangelists, as well as being pastors and teachers. Paul is both preacher and teacher, a fact which underlines the very necessary task of ministering to the ever-deepening understanding of those who have been reached by the proclamation of the gospel by teaching them the whole counsel of God.

The 'everywhere' in 8 surely refers to every fellowship. Paul is legislating for all the churches under his influence. The 'holy hands' and 'without wrath and doubting' seem to link with the Apostle's earlier reference to 'holding faith and a good conscience', and remind us that the cardinal element in true prayer is no mere outward ritual but the inward, moral state of the one who prays. If we are not right, our prayers cannot be.

19)2:9-10

It will help us to remember that Paul has behaviour in public worship in mind here. It is not easy to see the connection between his words on prayer in 8 and what he says here about women, and some have thought that the words 'in like manner' begin a new section and a new subject. Nevertheless, we incline to think there is a connection, especially since there seems to be a similar idea expressed, with a similar connection, in 1 Peter 3, where Peter speaks of the influence that can be brought to bear on an unbelieving husband without the Word by the chaste demeanour of the wife. It would almost seem that what Paul is suggesting here is that 'the same result will come through women who show a true Christian modesty in demeanour as is effected by men in their prayer'. Whether this be the connection between the two statements or not, it is clear that Paul regarded seemliness in women as extremely important, and that it could be expressed, or shown to be lacking, by the nature of their outward adornment. It is impressive to see how Paul deals with this very 'mundane' subject from a strictly biblical standpoint, taking us back to origins in the book of Genesis and to the orders of creation. In this connection we should remember that the purpose of clothes as originally instituted by God was to promote modesty and seemliness - a fact which becomes increasingly neglected and discounted in modern times. It is certainly a Christian duty for a Christian woman to dress well, but to dress well will mean to do so in a seemly and modest fashion. There is all the difference in the world between the natural grace and charm and winsomeness of an attractive personality and the studied elegance of the fashion-conscious, who dress explicitly to attract men or - worse still - with a desire to outdo their fellows. Such usually have their reward, for they succeed in their aim; succeed, but at the same time expose themselves in their rather pathetic idolatry as having a quite mistaken notion of what it is that makes women attractive, to anybody. It is the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit that shows a woman to have realised her true destiny as a woman.

20)2:11-12

These verses show that behind these injunctions in 9, 10 there are basic spiritual principles. Women are to dress and behave thus because they reflect the inward reality of their submission to men. This is evidently a hard doctrine for some women to accept (although it is surprising just how many women do, not only without reluctance but without hesitation), but we should realise that Paul is not implying that women are inferior to men. He is not disputing the equality of the sexes in dignity and status in the sight of God, but indicating a differentiation of function. It is in this functional differentiation that man is constituted as head of the woman, having authority over her. Nor does Paul teach, here or anywhere else, that a man's lordship ('Sarah called Abraham lord' - 1 Peter 3:6) can ever justify lording it over woman. But it does mean that certain duties and responsibilities are man's prerogative rather than woman's, and she may not usurp them without transgressing the divine order. There are those, we know, who take issue with Paul in this doctrine, and flatly disagree with him. What we cannot understand, however, is the attitude of those who blandly declare that there is no scriptural evidence for excluding women from the teaching ministry in the Church. It is surely an impeachment of a man's intelligence, let alone of his moral integrity, for him to state, in spite of the evidence of these verses, that there is nothing in the Scriptures to forbid women teaching in the Church. Is it that they are afraid to admit to themselves that they are flatly in disagreement with the Scriptures? But would it not be more honest to say, 'I am in disagreement with what the Scriptures teach on this subject'? Nobody can possibly accept the idea of women in the ministry without disagreeing with Paul and the teaching of the Scriptures.

21)2:13-15

Paul gives reasons in 13 and 14 why woman is to be in submission and subjection to man. First, he points out that she was made second, not first, in creation, made moreover of a rib taken from man's side, thus signifying her dependent existence. Second, as Barnes puts it, 'in the most important situation in which she was ever placed, she had shown that she was not qualified to take the lead'. Satan looked for a weak point in the human order, to accomplish his purposes, and the fact that he succeeded in finding it proves Paul's point. The woman, being deceived, was in the transgression. Paul's next statement is very difficult. What does it mean that women shall be saved in childbearing? (15). On the face of it, it would almost seem that Paul is guarding against a possible misinterpretation of his teaching in 14, which might make him seem to be suggesting that because of her part in the fall of man woman had put herself beyond the pale of salvation; and Paul hastens to correct such a false notion, held perhaps by some who (see 4:3) depreciated marriage as involving sin or uncleanness. If this is what lies behind Paul's words, he is saying that marriage and childbearing are not to be regarded as dishonourable (see Hebrews 13:4) or as a hindrance to salvation. The reference, however, may be more general, pointing back to Genesis 3:16, where the pains of childbirth are said to be woman's sentence for her sin. In undergoing them she finds her salvation, in the same way as toil, which was man's sentence, can become a stepping stone to fulfilment for him. Thus, the more submissive to her womanly calling she is, fulfilling her destiny by acquiescing in all the conditions of a woman's life - the duties of home and particularly that of being a mother - the more she will find God's will for her, which is salvation. Not that - as Ellicott puts it - a woman satisfies the conditions of her life by merely fulfilling the duties of a mother. Faith, love, holiness - these are the paramount spiritual realities, but these will lead her to the acceptance of the other, and together to life that is life indeed.

22)3:1

It is not certain whether the 'true' or 'faithful' saying is in the previous verse (2:15) or in what follows, but most commentators relate it to what Paul now proceeds to say about the office of a bishop. The subject of this whole chapter, as we see from 15, is the promotion of good order in the Church. The 'bishop' of New Testament times seems to have been the same as the 'presbyter', the duties assigned to each, and the requisite character of each, being almost identical (Lock), as will be seen from a comparison between this passage and Titus 1:5, 6. One question that arises is whether Paul means that it is the desire for the office, or the office itself, that is good. Commentators refer it to the desire for the office, but surely, if we remember Hebrews 5:4, referring to the priesthood, 'No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God', it should be clear that Paul would never encourage men to covet place and position in the Church. We should recall also what Jeremiah said to his servant, 'Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not' (Jeremiah 45:5). All the available evidence in Scripture shows that men whom God has called to high duty in His kingdom have tended to shrink from, rather than aspire to, such a responsibility (cf Exodus 4:10; Jeremiah 1:6). The emphasis, then, is on the solemn dignity of the office, and Paul is saying that if a man desires this, he must be very sure of the motives which prompt him to do so. 'Zeal for the glory of God, love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and a desire for the salvation of men' must be 'the great motives and chief inducements to enter' into such a ministry. Anything other than this is suspect.

23)3:2-3

The impressive list of moral and spiritual 'qualifications' Paul enumerates here is surely sufficient to daunt the boldest and most self-confident who would aspire to office, and this is surely the Apostle's intention. One is reminded of our Lord's reply to the disciples who wished to sit on His right hand and left in His kingdom: 'Can ye drink of the cup that I drink? For this is the kind of person you will have to be'. So Paul, here. 'Blameless' means irreproachable, unimpeachable in character. 'Husband of one wife' has been taken in different ways, to imply (a) that he must be a married man, (b) that he must not be a polygamist, (c) that he must be a faithful husband, (d) that he must not have divorced one wife and married another, (e) that he must not have married a second time after his first wife's death. This last is disputed on the ground that elsewhere Paul permits the remarriage of widows (cf 1 Corinthians 7:8, 9), but here he is speaking not of ordinary believers but of those in office in the church. It is difficult, however, if not impossible, to decide categorically that this is what Paul has in mind. What is clear, however, is that the 'blamelessness' of the bishop must apply to his home-life as well as to his relations with others outside. 'Vigilant' means 'temperate' in the sense of having balanced judgment. How very necessary this is in the proper conduct of the affairs of God's house, bringing a wise and mature mind to problems and difficulties that cannot afford to be surrounded by emotional thinking!

24)3:2-3

We must look again at these verses. They are too full of teaching to be lightly passed by. Hospitality is a duty, not indeed solely for the 'bishops' of a fellowship to exercise, but for all members (Hebrews 13:2). The word literally means 'the love of strangers' (from 'xenos', meaning strange or unusual). Obviously there are some more in a position to fulfil this ministry than others, but it is still true that many homes that could be opened to the stranger, the lonely, and the unusual in the fellowship, aren't. These, however, are the very people who by their need have a claim on Christian care and understanding, and we must learn to put the burden of befriending those who seem 'out of it' because of painful shyness or 'surface' unattractiveness before the personal satisfaction and pleasure of entertaining people we naturally like and know well. 'Apt to teach' does not necessarily imply preaching, for not all in the eldership are called to such a work; but if as believers we are all expected to be able to give a reason for the hope that is in us, it should not be too much to ask of an elder that he be able to instruct others in the way of salvation, either in pastoral oversight or in, say, Sunday School teaching. Ellicott thinks 'not given to wine' refers not to drunkenness but to 'the habit of frequenting noisy banquets where wild and imprudent words are often spoken'. This, and the other qualities warned against in 3, would seem to underline the need for not only godly but circumspect behaviour. A man of God can never be too careful about where or what he is seen to be or do, for it is seldom that the eyes of men are not assiduously watching him.

25)3:4-5

There are two opposite dangers to be avoided in the discipline of bringing up children in a Christian home, over-strictness on the one hand, and laxity on the other. What needs to be recognized is that these are false alternatives, and no-one in seeking to avoid the one need fall into the other. Discipline there must be, for letting children please themselves is the surest way of letting them go to the devil. But that discipline must be wise and understanding, not harsh and unfeeling and imperious, for this can reap frightful harvests in later years in young people kicking over the traces, not to say abandoning altogether the faith of their fathers. This, however, requires to be added here: parents should not allow themselves to be haunted by the fear that they are being too strict with their children. The real indictment is not against strict upbringing as such, but only against strictness that is lacking in understanding, and above all in real love and humanity. Let there be real love and caring in the home, and even extreme strictness will do the children no harm. Patient, kindly, loving firmness that will stand no nonsense - this is what Paul means by 'ruling well'. And if a man fails here, what warrant do we have for supposing that he will rule any better in the house of God? If he is unfaithful in the 'few things' (Matthew 25:23), is this likely to make him an effective ruler over 'the many?'

26)3:6-7

Paul enumerates two further qualifications for the bishop or elder in these verses. He must not be a novice, that is one who has recently come into the faith. He must first prove himself, and show by steady progress and consistent development in the Christian life that not only is he worthy to assume such a solemn responsibility, but also that he is able to stand it. It is sadly true that there are those who, finding themselves elevated to a position of authority for which neither training nor experience has adequately fitted them, fall sometimes imperceptibly and sometimes headlong into attitudes of pride and vanity. This is much more likely to happen, says Paul, with someone young in the faith, who has not learned how deceitful his own heart is. It is certain that when a man is lifted up with pride in this way, all possibility of usefulness in the service of God is lost, and a fellowship is very fortunate if much worse does not follow. Further, the man chosen must be one who is held in respect by the community as well as by the Church. It is scarcely possible to over-emphasise the importance of this. It is all too possible for a man to be one thing to his associates in the Church and quite another in the outside world. Those outside have a shrewd and sometimes unerring aptitude for penetrating a religious guise; they know when a man is real and when he is not, and are often better able to assess this than those within the fellowship to which he belongs. If a man passes the acid test of the world's critical scrutiny, he may be brought forward with confidence; but if he does not, then not only will the fellowship be well advised to have second thoughts about his ordination, it will be disastrous if they do not, and it will bring the Church's good name - and the name of Christ - into disrepute. We can never be too careful in such matters.

27)3:8-12

The qualifications for the office of deacon are similar to those for that of bishop or elder given in the previous verses. Deacons were first appointed in Acts 6 'to serve tables', i.e. undertake the responsibility of the 'daily ministrations' in the fellowship, handling, so to speak, the material concerns of the Church. 'Wives' in 11 is taken by some to refer, not to the wives of the deacons (nothing is said in earlier verses about the wives of bishops), but merely to 'women' who are involved in 'official' duties in the Church, deaconesses. If this be so, then Paul is stating a common standard of moral and spiritual integrity for all who are called to service in the fellowship, bishops, deacons and deaconesses alike. In this he simply echoes Acts 6 itself, where the great, overriding consideration is that it should be men filled with the Holy Ghost as the apostles themselves were that were to be appointed to the work. Since this is so, it can hardly be thought that the deacons were considered as holding an inferior office to the bishops', but merely a different one, a point which has relevance, as we shall see, in the interpretation of 13. It would be good for the life of the Church if we thought less in terms of 'promotion' in the Church's service, and more of the one essential qualification required for any service that is to be done, the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit.

28)3:8-12

There are one or two points of detail to be looked at in these verses before leaving them. 'Double-tongued' in 8 could mean 'repetitive', and the warning would then be that deacons must not be talebearers, gossiping round the fellowship. But it can also mean saying one thing to this man and another to that, like Mr Facing-both-Ways in Bunyan. There are people who can be very 'spiritual' in spiritual company and very 'unspiritual' in other company, in with one crowd one day, and in with another the next. They cannot stand being unpopular, because lacking in moral courage and integrity; they are therefore not dependable in the spiritual sense, and ought not to be given responsibility in the work. The commentators say that the stress in 9 is on the phrase 'in a pure conscience', as 'the casket in which the jewel is to be kept' (one recalls Paul's phrase in 2 Corinthians 4, 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels'). A jewel, we should remember, is always seen at its best in a proper setting. A godly and circumspect life is the best environment in which to display the glories and beauties of the faith once delivered unto the saints.

29)3:13

If the office of deacon is to be thought of as different from, but not inferior to, that of the elder or bishop, we can hardly interpret Paul here to mean that if a man proves to be a good deacon it is the first step on the ladder of promotion to the eldership. What he does mean is that a man who fulfils a faithful stewardship in the diaconate purchases for himself a good standing with men, and gains their respect, and therefore their ear. One commentator explains the word 'degree' as 'a vantage ground for influence'. This is a fruitful suggestion. Paul is thinking of the man who, although he has never set out to seek this, by the very doing of his work in lowliness and faithfulness, creates a certain impression in others by the sheer worth of his character. When such a man speaks about the faith, he will be listened to with respect and attention. What he speaks louder than what we say, and we have always to earn the right to gain the ear of the outside world and of the Church alike. Here, then, is a word of wide application. Let the work to which we are called, whatever it be, be done with faithfulness and integrity of purpose, and it will speak for itself, thus enabling us to speak with an authority which is come by in no other way.

30)3:14-15

In these verses Paul tells Timothy why he has written thus to him. His great concern is that Timothy should know just how important it is that the Church of God should be rightly ordered and governed ('house' refers not to a building, but to the household or people of God). The Church, then, as the people of God is shown forth as holding up to men the saving truth of the gospel. This is why we are not only called upon to assemble ourselves together but also to do so 'according to the pattern shown us on the mount', so to speak, for a rightly ordered fellowship is a witness to the truth, and is seen to be a bastion of living truth and therefore a light in the community, commending the gospel to men. This is the idea expressed in the thought of the Church as a pillar, holding up the truth. In another sense, of course, it is the truth that holds up, or sustains, the Church, but this is not the aspect that Paul is concerned to deal with at this point. It is the testimony to the truth that a real fellowship of the people of God can be, when its corporate life, the inter-relation between its members, husbands with wives, parents with children, elders and deacons with members, is ordered in accordance with the divine intention and ideal. True Christian behaviour in the corporate sense is the justification of the Christian claim that there is a real and living God and that His is a great salvation.

31)3:16

This is one of the most remarkable verses in all Scripture. For sheer weightiness of doctrinal content it must stand as one of the richest expressions of Christian truth in existence. Many scholars think it is a quotation from an ancient credal hymn in use in the early Church. If this be so, one may judge the richness and depth of ancient hymnology. The form of the six fold statement certainly suggests a hymnal construction, and this is further borne out by the fact that 'God' does not appear in the Greek text, only 'Who' - as if the Apostle were breaking into the verse of a hymn at a particular point to suit his purpose. The 'mystery of godliness' might well be interpreted as referring to the mysterious workings of God's redeeming grace that were necessary to make bad men good - the gospel mystery of making men godly. It is the movement of eternity for our sakes. When God made the worlds, He made them by the word of His power. But the redemption of sinners cost Him His only-begotten Son. Not by a word could He redeem, but by blood, and sacrifice. The six fold statement naturally falls into two parts or 'verses', the first three phrases describing the life of the Incarnate Son of God on earth, and the last three the life of the ascended, glorified Lord in heaven. We shall turn to detailed consideration in the next Note. We should notice particularly in the meantime the objective, Christ exalting, emphasis of the Apostle's words. It is all Christ with Paul, and this is the greatness of his gospel.

32)3:16

Christ, says Paul, was manifested in the flesh. The eternal Word became man in the fulness of the time, coming from beyond time into time for our sakes. Here is a clear implication of the pre-existence of Christ before His birth at Bethlehem. This is how men can be godly. He has taken our humanity, and not only so, He comes to dwell in us (see Colossians 1:27 same mystery?) to make us godly. 'Justified in the spirit' - some take this in a general sense to refer to the whole of Christ's early life and work as being justified, or being borne testimony to by the Spirit; others think it refers particularly to the resurrection, by which, as the Apostle says in Romans 1:4, He was declared to be the Son of God with power. A.T. Pierson takes it as covering the whole of biblical revelation, including the testimony of the Spirit to Him in Old Testament days, in prophecy, His earthly life, in which the Spirit justified Him by works and words of miraculous power and grace, and finally His resurrection, which was the divine imprimatur on the worth and sufficiency of His atoning death. 'Seen of angels' - Lock takes the first two phrases as describing the life of the Incarnate as seen on earth, and this, the third, as describing that life as seen from heaven. It is a striking concept, and suggests the wonder and awe with which the angels of God viewed the unfolding mystery of the Incarnation, first prophesied in old time, then fulfilled at Bethlehem. Both Paul and Peter seem to hint at this elsewhere, Paul in Ephesians 3:10 referring to the manifold wisdom of God, and Peter in his first epistle (1:12). We must pause at this point for reflection, and like Peter's angels, 'look into' the last three phrases in the next Note.

33)3:16

Now it is the life of the ascended Lord that is brought before us. 'Preached unto the Gentiles' sums up the whole of the Acts of the Apostles and all Church history. This was the whole purpose of the fulfilment of the divine promise in the Incarnation and the Cross, and Resurrection, that there might be a gospel to preach to all men. There is a grandeur about Paul's thought here that thrills the heart. While the angelic world was admiring the matchless grace of God on high, the world of men below was hearing the glad sound of the gospel and responding to it. 'Believed on in the world' - the gospel is not only the story of God's redeeming work, it is power and is able in itself to elicit the response of faith in the hearts of men. Faith comes by hearing it. It is a great mystery that men should be brought to love the God they used to hate, but the power of this self-manifestation of God is such that it bends the will and reconciles the hearts of men to Himself. 'Received up into glory' - this is a reference to the ascension of Christ. It speaks not merely of His return to the Father's right hand after His work was ended, but supremely of His 'official' appointment to the place of power and authority as Victor over sin and death and hell. It is His 'coronation' on the basis of which He exercises His kingly rule in the hearts of His people, and ministers the benefit of His earthly, mediatorial work to them. Wesley captures the sense of these words in the hymn 'Rejoice the Lord is King', and the rapture and exultation of his words matches the Apostle's thought. Great indeed is the mystery of godliness!

34)4:1

Over against the mystery of godliness Paul sets the mystery of iniquity. The contrast is startling but, we doubt not, intentional, for he shows us the dark backcloth against which the work of building up the Church of God is to be done. It should be a matter for encouragement, not dismay, to realise that although 'the mystery of iniquity doth already work' (2 Thessalonians 2:7), the mystery of godliness is at work also, and that in spite of some departing the faith under the influence of the powers of darkness, God is calling out a people for His Name, and filling up the roll of His elect. 'Expressly' means 'clearly' or 'unmistakably', and Paul is referring to a definite intimation made by the Spirit either to himself directly, or to some prophet. It is important for us to note that this direct intimation is in harmony with what the Scriptures teach elsewhere, as, for example, in our Lord's own words in the Olivet prophecy. The intimations of the Spirit are never out of harmony with the teaching of the Scriptures, and all claims to inspiration must be tested by this touchstone. The departure from the faith is directly attributed to demonic powers, and it is perhaps salutary for us to be reminded that demons have other activities than making their victims foam at the mouth. Bodily possession is doubtless a terrible thing, but when men's minds are held captive by the lies and seductions of the devil it is more terrible still, and far more dangerous. How can this happen? Not inadvertently, but through consent being given at some point, and place therefore given to the devil (Ephesians 4:27). The operative word here is 'giving heed'. That is all Satan asks of us; he will do the rest.

35)4:2-3

It seems clear from the participles - 'speaking', 'having', 'forbidding', 'commanding' - that the source of the evil influence on those who fall away lies in false teachers who themselves are the tools of Satan. It is not the demons themselves that speak lies, as the AV seems to suggest, but those who serve them. The NEB renders the phrase, 'Through the specious falsehoods of men whose own conscience is branded with the devil's sign'. The characteristics, then, mentioned here, are those of the teachers, not the taught, but of course they become those of the taught also. The false-teachers of these devil inspired heretics clearly involves a false asceticism - 'forbidding to marry, abstaining from meats' - based on the completely erroneous view that matter was essentially evil, and that therefore natural bodily functions were necessarily evil too. This not only stands in the sharpest antithesis to the Christian position, but in fact constitutes a denial of it, for ultimately it denies the possibility of the Incarnation, in which God Himself took our flesh and nature for our salvation. To assume therefore that the source of evil lies in matter is to ignore its essentially 'spiritual' origin, and the fact that even if it were theoretically possible to cut oneself off from every contact and complicity with the material in life, the real problem of sin would not have been touched. More of this in the next Note.

36)4:3-5

There are two things which it is important to make clear from the authentic Christian standpoint in relation to these verses. On the one hand, as Paul is at pains to remind us here, God has given us richly all things to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17), and the gifts of creation and providence are to be received gladly and used to the full as means of enrichment and blessing to our lives. There is nothing niggardly about God's provision. He has surrounded His creatures with a prodigality of love. The Psalmist's words, 'At Thy right hand are pleasures for evermore' apply just as much to temporal as to spiritual realities. There are many temporal and material blessings that are included in the 'all things' that God freely gives us along with the Gift of gifts (Romans 6:23). How can they be evil, if it is God Who gives them? On the other hand, there is a Christian 'asceticism', by which a believer may choose to forgo such pleasures and blessings. But he does not thus forgo them because they are evil, or because he thinks they are evil. On the contrary, he forgoes things that are good as a discipline that will promote a higher good. And this in two ways. He may do so to prove to himself that these good gifts of God are not beginning to mean too much to him, and to satisfy himself that he has not, through being too taken up with them, lost sight of the true riches. 'I will not be brought under the power of any' of these things, says Paul (1 Corinthians 6:12). We are to use, not abuse, the world (1 Corinthians 7:31), and one way to make sure of preventing abuse is to apply a healthy discipline to ourselves from time to time. But we may also forgo legitimate pleasures and blessings normally enjoyed because, though good in themselves, they may militate against our highest and best in Christian warfare. The athlete cuts out many things good in themselves when in strict training; he cannot afford to indulge them if he intends to win the race. He must so run that he may obtain the prize, and this cannot be accomplished without strenuous and severe discipline. But this, as will be obvious, is a very different matter from the false asceticism Paul condemns in these verses.

37)4:6-7

The implication of Paul's words in 6 is very striking and significant. We might almost have expected him to have said, in view of his teaching in the previous verses, that if Timothy himself remembered these things, he would be a good minister of Christ nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine (and of course this may be assumed, for we can hardly doubt that Timothy in fact did remember the Apostle's teaching). But what he does say is that the test or proof of his being a good minister is that he should put the brethren in remembrance of these things. In other words, the full fruition of the work of God in him and of his preparation as a minister is the communication of the truth to others. The purpose of Christ's work for us, and the Spirit's work in us, is that God might work through us and accomplish His purposes thereby. Is there a hint here that Timothy might hesitate, through natural timidity, to communicate truths that were bound to challenge any leanings towards heresy among the believers in Ephesus? One recalls Paul's own words to the elders of Ephesus at Miletus, 'I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God', 'I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you' (Acts 20:20, 27). It is sadly true that some men know more than they are prepared to preach to their people, and withhold truth from them because they are not prepared to bear the reproach of unpopularity or opposition that fearless and faithful preaching often awakens. It is easier, but in the end far more costly to the soul, to be silent or innocuous in face of deeply entrenched evil instead of thoroughly exposing it for what it is. But it is also better to suffer for being faithful to the truth of God than to suffer, as we certainly shall, for being unfaithful to it.

38)4:7b-8

There is a great deal for us to learn from these important statements made by the Apostle, and we must take our time over them. The contrast he draws is between the barren and profitless speculation of the false religion, which he characterises as old wives' fables and the 'spiritual athleticism' of the true. The 'exercise' unto godliness which he recommends to Timothy should be regarded as the counterpart of the 'givenness' of the gospel of revelation as described in 3:16, for example. It is the becoming what God has made us in Christ, the energy of a living faith appropriating what is ours in the gift of God. The indicatives of the gospel are ever followed by the imperatives and we are to work out what God has worked in. Having unveiled 'the promised land' so to speak, in the great affirmations of grace, Paul bids us now 'go in and possess the land', battling with giants and overcoming all manner of difficulties in so doing. It is the presenting our bodies a living sacrifice, the committing of our hearts and lives to the crucible or shape of doctrine that is going to fashion us according to His image. It is perhaps significant that the words 'godliness' and 'godly' appear 29 times in the Scriptures, all but four of these references being in the New Testament, and by far the greatest majority in the later writings, the pastoral and general epistles. 'Be godly' - it is the final, farewell exhortation of the apostles to the Church, as if to say, 'In view of all our teaching, and all the dangers and evils of this present age, godliness of life is the only safeguard, the only bulwark, the only testimony in a godless world'.

39)4:8

There are two ways of interpreting the words 'Bodily exercise profiteth (for a) little (time) - or a limited extent'. One is to take it to refer to natural athletic discipline. The ancients used to speak of 'a healthy mind in a healthy body', and undoubtedly this is a sound principle to follow, since body and mind are integrally linked together. But the cult of the body can undoubtedly become a fetish, and Paul gives a salutary reminder here (on this interpretation of the phrase) that athleticism and sport are to be kept in their proper place in the life of the Christian, and not allowed to become an idolatry. And beyond question a sense of proportion badly needs to be regained in our sport-mad generation. Nero, we are told, fiddled while Rome burned, and we, not to be outdone, have worshipped at the shrine of sport while Britain totters about drunkenly on the edge of economic ruin! And even Christians are prone to judge a man's moral and spiritual worth by his interest in, and ability at, games!

But the other interpretation of these words is much more likely to be the correct one. It sets 'bodily exercise' over against the 'soul-exercise' of which Paul speaks in 7, the bodily exercise referring to the false ascetic discipline mentioned in the previous verses. What Paul means is that the rigid application of ascetic discipline may help a little, but it is not the real answer in the attainment of a true and victorious Christian experience. You do not provide an answer to the lusts of the flesh by forbidding marriage (or by advocating it either); appetite is not curbed by commanding to abstain from meats (or by encouraging gluttony!). The remedy lies in that death to sin which is the answer in our experience to the death Christ died to sin for us - in other words, in the appropriation of the wealth that is ours in His passion and victory. 'The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation' (2 Peter 2:9).

40)4:8

We continue on this important theme. What Paul is saying is this: If you go, like the monks, into the desert to escape the temptations of the flesh, you will only find that the temptations will follow you there also, and attack you with renewed force in your solitude. The most rigid and severe asceticism will only help so much; something other, and deeper, is necessary, namely, 'the expulsive power of a new affection' to use Chalmers' famous phrase.

'What can strip the seeming glory
From the idols of the earth?
Not a sense of right or duty
But the sight of peerless worth.'

It is the difference between legalism and grace that Paul is underlining. And this has very real relevance in a number of directions, particularly in relation to Christian teaching on 'the world'. The parents and mentors of young people often seek to shield them completely from all forms of 'worldliness' by applying rigid vetoes and taboos on all sorts of activities. Now, certainly young people need wise and firm discipline in their upbringing, but it is a practical impossibility to shield them altogether from the world, and even if it were technically possible, it could only be at the cost of natural life itself. The true Christian position is that we are 'in the world, not of the world', and the true Christian character and personality must be forged in the world, in face of it, not withdrawing from it. We cannot exclude the world, for we have to live in it, and it is a counsel of defeat as well as of despair to apply a rigid and exclusive asceticism in the belief that this is godliness. It is possible to shield young people, and ourselves, too much, and to molly-coddle them, and ourselves, too much, and keep them in a hot-house atmosphere. And the moment they are exposed to the colder atmosphere of the outside world (and they will be, must be, eventually) they wilt. A Christian is not a hot-house plant; he must learn to live and grow in all weathers. 'Bodily exercise' stern and unremitting discipline, simply drives the problem inwards; it is still there, and if we still want to do it in our heart of hearts, although our outward behaviour is under control, that is not salvation as the New Testament understands it. It can be expelled from the heart too, and this is what true godliness does for us. It is unto this that we must exercise ourselves, becoming what God has made us in Christ and entering into His full and sufficient provision for our every need.

41)4:8b-9

Godliness has promise concerning the life that now is, let alone the life that is to come. That means that there is nothing in human experience that is not enhanced and enriched by godliness of living. The more godly we are, the more we shall enjoy the manifold gifts of the divine providence, the more, indeed, we shall be capable of enjoying them. Our leisure will be purified and sweet, our recreation, our personal relationships, all these things will be transformed and transfigured when godliness of life becomes the foundation on which they are built. This is something that must sound so incredible to the worldling as to be utterly discounted, but the fact remains that it is he, not the godly man, who is dull and uninteresting. When one thinks just how difficult it is to enjoy oneself in the world, and what an expenditure of effort it demands to extract the merest ounce of pleasure therefrom, one sees that it would be a veritable and unthinkable disaster to have to go back to such a bleak and dreary existence, having once tasted of the strong and heady torrent of divine pleasure! It should go without saying, of course, that godliness has promise of the life which is to come. Godliness here will not only enhance the life to come, it will add lustre to it in the glory everlasting. The building of gold, silver and precious stones into the life that now is (1 Corinthians 3) will reap a reward hereafter, the splendour of which is beyond all telling, and only hinted at in the Scriptures for very glory (cf Matthew 25:21; Luke 19:17). This, says Paul, is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance (although 9 can be fairly taken to refer to what follows in 10 as well as to what precedes in 8), and it is worth pondering for a little while today.

42)4:10-11

The operative word in 10 is 'therefore', and it refers what is said in the remainder of the verse back to the statement on godliness in 8. The words 'suffer reproach' would be more accurately rendered 'struggle' or 'agonise', and have reference to the exercise unto godliness afore mentioned (7). 'Trust' here means 'have set our hope upon', and belongs in thought to the phrase 'that which is to come' in 8. It is the prospect of the 'hope' and the 'reward' that is the incentive to press on in the race and win the prize. This is the 'slant' that Timothy's ministry is to have; the dimension of eternity is to condition all of this present life.

To say that God is the Saviour of all men does not mean that all men are saved. Indeed, the additional 'specially of those that believe' seems meant to indicate a distinction between those who are and those who are not. The reason for this unusual and (to some) disturbing statement seems to be the same as for Paul's repeated emphasis on 'all' in 2:1-6; God's salvation is not for a favoured few, either Jews only, with their intensely exclusive and nationalistic outlook, or the Gnostic heretics who claimed that only the 'initiated' could hope for salvation, but for all men everywhere, and upon no other ground than that of believing in Christ.

43)4:12-13

Age has often little to do with spiritual development and maturity, still less with spiritual authority. Some young Christians develop more in a year than others do in twenty. Older believers who are stung and rebuked by the spiritual authority of a younger man may often disparagingly brush aside what he says with some slighting comment about his youth or 'inexperience'. But this is a dismal refuge, and although it may hurt or discourage him, it does not fool God, Who remembers the slight to His servant, and will not hold them guiltless. But the servant's testimony must be backed home - indeed, this is what gives him his authority - by a life that is consistent in all things with it, as 12b makes clear.

'Reading' in 13 refers to the public reading of the Scriptures in the house of God, and along with 'exhortation' and 'doctrine' would describe the pattern of Timothy's ministry in Ephesus. The reading of the Scriptures would doubtless include comment on them following the scriptural pattern indicated in the Old Testament. One recalls how Ezra, the scribe read the book of the law to the people, giving the sense and causing them to understand the reading (Nehemiah 8:8). This is certainly what happened in the time of the Reformation when after centuries in which the Word of life had been withheld from the people, a great and blessed unfolding of divine truth brought life and enrichment to the whole Church of Christ. It is just as certain that this is the need of our time, to combat the ignorance and challenge the godlessness of the nation. 'Give the people the Word of God', cries Paul down the centuries. It is a challenge we cannot afford to neglect.

44)4:14-16

Compare 14 with 1:18 and 2 Timothy 1:6. Is this repeated insistence to Timothy due to the fact that, as already suggested, he was naturally timid of spirit and perhaps too easily discouraged when things became difficult? Whether this is the human side, or anything else, Paul confidently sets over against it the great objective reality of the divine call and endowment. And this is the sufficient answer to any and every human frailty or insufficiency, for God's call is His enabling. But as in 7 and 8, so it is also here. That divine enabling must be appropriated, and this is the force of 15. Timothy must meditate earnestly on these things, and give himself utterly to them until he is mastered by them, as Paul himself did, and was, in these silent years in Arabia before his missionary career began. This is the only way that profiting can appear. If the ministry is but one among other interests, people will see it, and know that a man has not given himself to the work utterly. When he does it will become evident to all. It is only when a man gives himself wholly to the Word of God that blessing gets through; only thus does he become a channel of divine compassion. Only when the Word has done its work in him - and is seen to have done so - has it much chance of doing its work in those to whom he ministers. This is why, in 16, Paul reminds Timothy that he has a twofold ministry - how he lives as well as what he says. He himself must be saved and being saved, as well as those that hear him, and therefore he must take heed unto himself as well as unto the doctrine. This is ever a salutary challenge to the servants of God. It is a mark of failure, and one fraught with peril to ourselves and others, to have been appointed a keeper of the vineyards and neglect to keep his own (Song of Solomon 1:6).

45)5:1-3

Paul now becomes more specific in the instructions he gives to Timothy, and proceeds to speak of the different classes of people who hear Timothy (4:16), older and younger men, older and younger women, widows. Two basic thoughts underlie the teaching of this whole chapter - the respect that is due to all, as members of the Christian family, and the importance of winning respect among pagan neighbours, as is implied in 7, 8, 14 and 6:1. There are some fine distinctions to be noted here. Paul does not mean that Timothy as a pastor must not exercise discipline upon older members in the fellowship. Age does not exclude a man from discipline. But there is a wrong way for a young pastor to exercise that discipline, and Paul is concerned lest Timothy should fall into error in this respect. On the one hand, he is to let no man despise his youth (4:12), but on the other he is not to 'lord it' over the fellowship, taking advantage of his office as pastor. Even within the context of discipline, Timothy must remember the commandment 'Honour thy father and thy mother' which carries with it, by implication, the idea of respect and age. This is something very important in its implications, and we must examine them carefully in the next Note.

46)5:1-3

What Paul is saying here is bound up with the concept of the Church as the Body of Christ, and of membership of that Body. Basic to the whole idea of membership of Christ is that we are members in particular, and therefore all different from one another. It is essential that this be remembered. True, we are all equal in dignity and status in the sight of God - all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28) - but we are all different as to function, and it is to this that Paul's words here bear witness. One has only to try to apply Galatians 3:28 in the context of these verses to see how irrelevant such a word (about equality of status) is when difference of function is under discussion. Old men are different from young men, and old women from young women, and must therefore be given the respect due to their position as such. But by the same token, the young are different from the old, and as such they also must be respected. The sanctity of personality is a thoroughly biblical idea and it is based ultimately on the truth that we are all uniquely different from one another, not equal to one another. In the structure of a family (and the Church is the family of God), as C.S. Lewis points out, 'the grandfather, the parents, the grown-up son, the child, the dog and the cat are true members (in the organic sense) precisely because they are not members or units of a homogeneous class. They are not interchangeable. Each person is almost a species in himself. The mother is not simply a different person from the daughter; she is a different kind of person. The grown-up brother is not simply one unit in the class children; he is a separate estate of the realm. The father and the grandfather are almost as different as the cat and the dog. If you subtract any one member, you have not simply reduced the family in number; you have inflicted an injury in its structure. Its unity is a unity of unlikes, almost of incommensurables.' This is why we are obliged to recognise both that there are those in the family (or Body) over us and that each must be treated with the respect due to his particular and unique position.

47)5:4-8

Instruction for the care of widows is now given. Widows 'indeed' (3) are described in 4 as those who are left utterly destitute with no children or grandchildren (not nephews) to help them. Such must become the care and responsibility of the Church. But otherwise, they are naturally the care and responsibility of their children and grandchildren, and this should not be passed on to the Church. Why should the fellowship undertake what is after all a man's plain and proper Christian duty to his mother? Why indeed! To fail in this duty is to fail in piety (4) and deny the faith (8), and makes a man worse than an infidel. This is a thought-provoking statement, particularly in relation to the Church's provision today of Eventide Homes for the elderly. No-one will deny the enormous good these have been in our modern society, but at the same time one sometimes feels that they are just a little too convenient for some families who tend to think of them as repositories for aged and unwanted relatives. Obviously there are cases in which families are not in a position to look after their old folks, either because of lack of accommodation or because they need trained nursing or medical care; but when all due exceptions are made, the question still remains of the ethics of handing over old people simply because they are no longer wanted or regarded as a nuisance or an inconvenience to those whose responsibility and duty it is to care for them. We are not doing them a favour, says Paul, in caring for them in their old age, but repaying a debt (4) we owe them for all they have done for us. It is an eloquent commentary on the corrupting power of affluence that a society that has 'never had it so good' should have become callous almost to the point of inhumanity in such matters.

48)5:9-10

These verses may simply refer to the widows in the fellowship who may be deemed suitable recipients of help, and as such they would show how carefully this sympathetic provision was to be administered and what steps were to be taken to see that the resources of the fellowship were not unwisely or unprofitably expended - the 'daily ministrations' was not intended to enable any to live in pleasure (6) - or given to those who did not really need it. But it is perhaps more likely that Paul is referring to an 'order of widows' who not only received maintenance but also performed certain specific functions and duties in the early Church. These would be widows who accepted their widowhood as a call from God to a specific service in the Church that required of them the continuation of their widowhood. Having committed themselves to such a course of service, they were, apparently expected not to withdraw themselves later from it, having accepted their widowhood as an entrance into a higher calling. The strictness of the qualifications regarding admission into this 'order', if such it was, would be explained by the nature of the work they were called to do, if we knew this for certain. Paul is not forbidding widows to re-marry, but warning against any committing themselves to work that was known to demand a perpetual widowhood, and then perhaps later revoking vows that had been made concerning it. We need not doubt that there are some who are called in this way to special service, such as a ministry of secret intercession for the work of the gospel (see 5), and it is surely theirs to exercise a potent influence for good, and to give greater and more effectual service than they could ever have known in earlier life.

49)5:11-16

These verses indicate the danger against which Paul warns in the previous verses. Paul's language seems strong and extreme, but we must remember our Lord's equally blunt warnings about those who, having put their hand to the plough, turn back again, and therefore prove themselves unfit for the kingdom of heaven. To 'cast off their first faith' in 12 must refer to the revoking of the vows they made on entering the 'office' of widows, and this is interpreted by Paul as 'waxing wanton' against Christ. It is the seriousness of breaking vows, not re-marriage, that constitutes the betrayal of faith, and it is perhaps significant that, having done so, their lives deteriorate into the commonplace and the unworthy (13). It is always when we step out of the divine plan and purpose for our lives that things go wrong personally, morally and socially. This is why Paul adds the injunction in 14. If a woman's calling is not to the 'order of widows' above-mentioned, it is putting an undue and unwise strain to venture into a life unsuited to her. Far better to remain in a woman's normal calling to marriage, child-bearing and homekeeping (see our Lord's teaching on a similar subject in Matthew 19:10-12).

50)5:17-18

The simplest and plainest interpretation of these words is most probably the right one, namely, that it refers to financial remuneration. This is the Lord's estimate of the work of those who labour faithfully in word and doctrine. (The present writer has no axe to grind in this matter, and is therefore free to comment and interpret without fear of being misunderstood. But there are others reading these Notes who are ministered to by faithful men in other places, and who may not have taken their responsibilities in this matter with a true scriptural realism and earnestness). There is the 'spiritual' Christian, for example, who has the notion that those who are called to full-time service for the Lord are thereby called to financial sacrifice also, and that therefore they ought to be kept on as low a remuneration as possible, consonant with bare subsistence (and sometimes not even that). But there is not one level of financial sacrifice for ministers and missionaries, and another for those who are supposed to support them. If we think a servant of God should have a certain attitude to money, we had better see to it that we ourselves have that attitude also. There are those who set a standard of sacrificial service for their ministers and missionaries that they have no intention of living up to themselves, as if the assumption were being made that it would be bad for them spiritually to have too much easement of their financial burdens and problems. But do such people really think that faithful and honoured servants of God are so easily corrupted by a more ample provision of their material needs? Do they realise that men who have learned the inner secret of bearing the Cross in the deep places of their experience (this is what spells fruitfulness in any ministry) have learned that God has other ways of keeping them low at His feet, and that He does not need their doubtless well-meaning but mistaken, and sometimes offensive, efforts to impose humility on His servants? Do Christians not in full-time service decline salary increments in order to promote their own humility? Are there, then, two standards of sacrificial service in Christian life?

51)5:19-21

There are two points to be noted in these verses. On the one hand, complaints or accusations made against elders - ruling or teaching - must never be countenanced unless they are substantiated by adequate evidence from two or three witnesses. This injunction and warning is not only designed to safeguard a good man's reputation and character against irresponsible and malicious attack, but also serves to check the temptation believers sometimes fall into of bandying about hearsay and gossip about others, and even idle rumour, to the harm and hurt of innocent people. A smear put upon the character of an utterly honourable man does not wear off quickly (people say, do they not, that there is no smoke without a fire?), and it is certain that many an innocent man has had his reputation ruined and his heart broken by the malicious, wagging tongues of bitter-spirited believers. If such people were asked to put their names, in writing, to the stories they pass around, it might serve to bring them up with a jerk, and make them realise the enormity of what they have been doing. On the other hand, however, if accusations are responsible and well-founded, it is a duty to investigate them and take appropriate action. The principle of discipline must be upheld in the Church of God, and sin must be dealt with (20). Nor must Timothy hesitate to take strong action if the situation warrants it. He - and we - must remember that discipline is exercised or not exercised in the sight of God and the elect angels, and that a strict account will have to be given concerning this particular stewardship. This solemn realisation ought to make us fear God more than the face of man, and save us from any partiality or compromise for fear of what any man or group of men might say or do. 'Arm me with jealous care', says Wesley, 'as in Thy sight to live'.

52)5:22-25

'To lay hands on' (22) has two possible interpretations. Either it refers to the ordination of elders and deacons, in which case it echoes and reinforces Paul's earlier warning 'not a novice' (3:6) and lays on us the duty of exercising a wise discernment in the choice of suitable men; or it may refer to the receiving back into the fellowship of offending and disciplined brethren. There is a duty, Paul would then mean, to see that the pain of the discipline does, and gets time to do, its gracious work. It is difficult to decide which of the two interpretations is the more likely here. The reference in 22 to being partakers in other men's sins might seem to have to do with the second interpretation, and to warn Timothy that a premature lifting of discipline would be tantamount to condoning the sin that had been disciplined. That there are dangers here must surely be clear, as we may gather from 2 Corinthians 2:1-11, but doubtless in our easy-going, spiritually-flabby age the danger for us would lie in the other direction. But 24 and 25 seem to refer to the choice of the proper man for the work of the eldership, although, as Lock points out, they emphasise the need for careful examination both for praise and for censure. Some men, says Paul, are clearly unsuitable because of the kind of life they live; there is no difficulty in rejecting them as possible candidates! But there are others who may seem to be suitable, and who only at a later date are shown to be not so. Wait, then, he urges, and exercise a wise discernment and restraint; it is better to be safe than sorry. In the same way, there are some who are clearly and obviously the right type of person, but there are others whose good and sterling qualities may not be immediately apparent. Wait there also, says Paul, for sooner or later they will shine out. Neither all the bad nor all the good in any man's character is revealed at once. Do not make any hasty final judgments either way, until you have a reasonable time to judge fairly and discerningly. The truth about them will out in the end.

53)5:22-25

A word about 23, which seems to be an aside. This is an embarrassing verse for those who advocate total abstinence from alcoholic liquor. It is pretty safe to assume, however, that the abstinence question as such, was not in Paul's mind here. Rather, what Paul is saying here to Timothy is that, in the interests of his own health, he ought to relax a perhaps over-severe asceticism that he had imposed upon himself with the regard to the drinking of wine, and that would not allow him to use it even medicinally. It may even be that the accusations against elders related to drunkenness, and that he felt, for example's sake, he must abstain completely. At all events, if this be what is in Paul's mind, it is a very necessary and wholesome piece of advice. It is certainly possible to be too hard and severe on one's body in the interests of rigid discipline, and although with many, perhaps most, the error lies in the opposite direction, yet with some this can be a real hindrance to fruitfulness, especially if such discipline and asceticism are being applied in a legalistic way. It is possible to be in bondage to a rigorous ascetic ideal, and to get to think of God (albeit unconsciously) as a harsh taskmaster who is not prepared to 'work' in and through us unless all the 'rules' we have formulated for ourselves are punctiliously obeyed, however tired, exhausted, and broken in health we may be. We can serve God better with a healthy stomach than with one that has been neglected and harmed more than it ought by constant fasting and asceticism.

54)6:1-2

The reference to servants and masters here is quite certainly the practice of slavery in the ancient world, not to the relationship between labour and management in industry, although what Paul says is certainly applicable to the latter also. One striking fact that stands out in the New Testament is that slavery as an institution is nowhere attacked or condemned, but frankly accepted without question. This does not mean that Paul was blind to the social implications of his own gospel, but simply that he believed in the principle of 'indirect influence', with the Spirit of the gospel working as a leaven in society, laying an effective restraint on evil institutions, if not overcoming them. This in fact ultimately did happen, as far as slavery was concerned; it became clear that it was wholly indefensible and incompatible with the Christian doctrine of the dignity and sanctity of human personality. Here Paul is concerned with Christian behaviour for slaves in the interim, and his instructions might well apply to many kinds of yokes and injustices until God's time of reformation. Within the evil yoke, then, they were to be good slaves. To think: 'Slavery is wrong, therefore I will work as little as I can' would be to blaspheme God's Name and the doctrine of the gospel. Not only so: they must be all the better slaves because those to whom they gave their service are one with them in the fellowship of the faith (see NEB). There must be no taking advantage of the fact that the master is a believer. Our Christian calling does not affect our social status as such, in the sense of enabling to take liberties that would be otherwise unthinkable. We must not take these liberties, but rather be thankful we are in such a fortunate position as having a Christian master, and show ourselves worthy of this in every way.

55)6:3-5

'Wholesome words' is a comprehensive term for the gospel as imparted by Paul, the healthful, health-giving Word of life, and refers here surely not only to the immediately preceding verses, but to all the practical instruction he has given throughout the epistle. We should note that this 'wholesome' teaching of his is equated with 'the words of our Lord Jesus', that is Christ teaches His Church through His appointed servants, and under the impress of the Spirit their words are His. The ultimate vindication of any teaching is that it should lead to godliness of life (3), and this is the test that must be applied to what J.B. Phillips calls 'doctrinal novelties' - a much-needed exercise in our day, with 'avant-garde' teaching rife, and Christians being regarded as not 'with it' unless they subscribe to such teachings. But it is better to be 'with God' and 'with the Scriptures' than 'with it'. 'Charity before chastity' may be very fashionable, but it is not a position the Scriptures ever countenance, nor does it lead to godliness of life. Paul's strictures in 5 are very much to the point in this connection, and it would bring a breath of realism into the contemporary debate if some of these ugly things were called by their proper names, instead of being paraded and hailed as great new discoveries. They are not new, but old, old as sin and the Fall, and need to be recognised as such.

56)6:6-8

'Gain is godliness' in 5 should be taken to mean 'gain is got from godliness'. The NEB renders it, 'They think religion should yield dividends'. Some, says Paul, are prepared to be religious if they think it will repay them. And we can hardly doubt that the seeds of such an attitude are present today in those who think it important to belong to the right Church socially. It pays them, it would appear, to know, and be known by, the right sort of people. Yet, in quite another sense than they mean, godliness is great gain, when linked with contentment. Godliness does pay, not in material ways necessarily, although these are not left out of account by a loving God Who knows our material needs, but above all in the spirit of contentment and detachment it brings to the heart. The godly learn that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth; they know that the secret does not lie either in having or in not having this world's goods, but in having Christ. To have Him, in the sense that Paul would use this term, is to have all and to abound, and also to have what can never be taken from us, as all material and cultural wealth can be, and will, by the hand of death. Food and raiment (8) are therefore a sufficiency (N.B. the simplicity of asking in the Lord's Prayer - daily bread, forgiveness, victory - which follows giving God first place), for this is but an interim life, and the true riches come later. Seek ye first the kingdom of God, says Jesus - Matthew 6:33 (see also Philippians 4:12, Hebrews 13:5 and the hymns:

'He that is down needs fear no fall.'

and especially the second verse,

'I am content with what I have,

Little be it or much.'

And

'My God, I thank Thee who has made

The earth so bright.'

57)6:9-10

These are solemn and indeed terrifying words, for the warning they speak to all our hearts. Note first that they are not about those that are rich, but of those who are not, and want to be, and are determined to be. It is impressive to realise that love of money is more likely to be a danger and a snare to those who do not have it than to those who do. It is the desire for it that can be so corrupting and demoralising. This love, says Paul, is a root of all evil, that is, it is one bitter root from which many, many evil things flow, a weak spot in the armour, through which hosts of devilish influences enter the soul to hurt, harm, and even destroy it. It is all too true that this world's empty glory can cost a man too dear, sometimes in terms of eternal salvation itself (cf the rich young ruler), often in terms of reward, and certainly in terms of usefulness in the service of the gospel (cf Demas, 2 Timothy 4:10). In the light of this, what we need to do is to take a calm, dispassionate, objective look at the situation, and ask ourselves simply, 'Is the gain of money -an uncertain commodity at the best of times - worth all this loss?'

58)6:11-14

The previous Note ended with a question which, as we see here, we must not take too long to answer. A swift conclusion in the negative is called for, then a clean pair of heels on the king's highways. If the injunction to flee these things is clear and peremptory, the further, and positive, command to 'follow after...' is just as unequivocal and decisive. Indeed, the categories are mutually exclusive, and what Paul means to convey is that only one of them is possible as a dominant interest in life - either the love of money, or love for God. And the law of displacement tends to work here; if we take the second alternative, we will be so fully occupied that we will not have time to be preoccupied with money. If you are running a race, you do not have time to pick flowers on the road, beguiling as it might be to stop for a while. And yet, displacement will not be without cost or tears, and it is significant that the list of godly qualities to be followed after is rounded off by the command to fight the good fight of faith, for they will not be got without the agony (such is the Greek word) of battle. Eternal life, and all that pertains to godliness and goodness, is ours in the gift of God, but we must lay hold on what is ours in Christ by the exercise of a living and wholehearted faith, as Israel had to go in and possess the land that the Lord had in title given them. Let us think today, then, of both flight and following after (11) as one central aspect of the good fight of faith.

59)6:11-14

There are two further points to be remembered in relation to the fight of faith. First of all, the fight of faith is often a fight for faith, a fight to realise our position in Christ, and maintain it in the face of every kind of opposition. The gospel summons us to be what God has made us in Christ, to become what we are in Him, but what deaths are to be died in obeying that summons! And faith lies on yonder side of death, and can be got only by passing through it. This is the fight in which we are involved. Secondly, the fight of faith is a fight against the danger of allowing things to displace God in the life, be they riches or any other good gift of God. Fight to put God first, says Paul, and this will make pleasures safer and, paradoxically, more enjoyable. When God is our first enjoyment and our best love, we are thereby set free to enjoy His manifold gifts as they were meant to be enjoyed, and they take their due and proper place. But the continuous tense Paul uses here for 'fight' indicates that this is never a once-for-all battle, but one that engages us all our days, until the appearing of Jesus Christ (14). Like Him, we must be obedient right to the end, and Paul in fact holds up the example of Christ as an inspiration to Timothy, and to us (13), as if to say, 'Christ has been through all this and beckons us to follow'. This is surely the best incentive to us to 'keep the commandment without spot, unrebukeable'. To live as in His sight, and in the light of the coming Day is a wondrous stimulus to holiness and steadfastness of life.

60)6:15-16

The thought of our Lord's return in glory awakens in Paul a wonderful doxology. One can imagine his scribe looking up from his desk as he wrote, marvelling at this torrent of glowing language pouring out of the aged apostle's lips, his eyes glowing with heavenly fire as he dictated his letter. It were almost superfluous to try to expound an utterance of such pure worship and adoration, but one comment may awaken and preserve that spirit in us also. The word 'blessed' in the AV has two Greek equivalents, one as in Ephesians 1:3, meaning 'to speak well of', the other, as here, meaning 'happy'. To read 'happy Potentate' here at first sounds out of place, if not irreverent, but if we pause to think for a moment, we find ourselves thinking, 'Why should it be strange to think of Him as a happy God?' The reason why we do not is that He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures as so grimly in earnest dealing with sin that He has not had much time to laugh. But when sin is finally destroyed, as it will be, His true nature will surely become clear and evident, and His happiness will shine forth as the glorious and riotous thing it is. But there is something else here. Many of us can recall the grim and terrible days of the last war when Britain stood alone against the might of Germany, when for long spells it was blood and toil, sweat and tears all the way. But even within that context, there were times when we could relax and smile. It is like this also in the war between God and evil. There are times, and they are very, very precious, when God takes time to relax with His people, times of sweet and happy fellowship when the tragedy of sin is left outside, and it is then that we have glimpses - that are also foretastes - of the happiness of God and the joy and delight that are in His holy heart. And Paul must have known more of this than anyone!

61)6:17-21

Paul deems it necessary to utter another warning before finishing about riches, this time to those who had them, rather than those who wanted them. It would be difficult to find a more apt and telling commentary on this than the words of the hymn, 'Earth's bliss - the 'all things' God richly gives us to enjoy - is meant to be our guide, not our chain. We are to use, but not abuse, the things of the world (1 Corinthians 7:31) and refuse to be brought under the power of any of it (1 Corinthians 6:12). Detachment from all things, through attachment to the Lord - this is what sets us free to be and do what we ought (16) and builds into us the gold, silver and precious stones (1 Corinthians 3:12) of character and integrity which are the only things we can take with us into the eternal world (19). Men with such a spirit are really rich, and will have much to bestow, both materially and spiritually on a needy world of men. Paul's final word to his son in the faith reminds us of 2 Corinthians 4:7 - treasure in earthen vessels. It is this that was committed as a sacred stewardship to him, and we can sense the longing and concern in the aged apostle's heart that the faith once delivered to the saints should be safeguarded and handed down after his own life's work was done. Nor need we doubt that Timothy heeded this solemn admonition, and kept himself from all that might sidetrack him and lead him astray. God grant that we may do likewise.