

James Philip Bible Readings

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THE BOOK of Second Timothy

1) 1:1

This epistle is almost certainly the last epistle that Paul wrote, written possibly as little as a month or two before his death (see 4:6). One commentary (the ICC) places the main interest of the epistle in the two character portraits delineated in it, that of the ideal Christian minister, and that of the Christian teacher face to face with death, his work finished. The first of these portraits occupies, in the main, the second and third chapters, and the latter the first and fourth. With reference to the latter, it is instructive to compare some of the statements Paul makes in his earlier prison epistle, Philippians, with his attitude in this (see Philippians 1:20-25; 2:17). It is one thing to speak of having a desire to depart and be with Christ when one is reasonably confident of surviving for a considerable time, but quite another to say such things and breathe such a spirit when it has become clear that life is soon to be forfeited. It is impressive to see how, in face of certain execution, Paul is calm and serene in the hope of the gospel (4:6-8). This is the force of his particular emphasis in 1, where he speaks of 'the main promise of life'. Particular circumstances direct one's thoughts to particular emphases of the gospel. Paul was facing death, and he garrisoned himself in such an extremity with the sure hope of the gospel. There is an enormously important principle at work here; we may not be facing death at the moment, but there are other hazards and difficulties to be faced, and we must learn to match them with the particular aspect of the gospel that meets them. Happy is the man who proves in the extremities of life that the gospel is all-sufficient for his needs!

2) 1:2

Paul's expression of endearment towards Timothy (see also 4) is characteristic of the Apostle, and tells a great deal about him. What we need to notice is the uninhibited, spontaneous expression and demonstration of love on his part towards his young son in the faith. He was never slow to show his love when he felt it, and this, we must understand, is not an optional grace in the Christian life. The gospel breaks down the barriers and inhibitions in the human heart (when we allow it to do so), and it is certain that such expressions of care as we see here are of almost incalculable value in times of need when those who receive them are under pressures of various kinds. It may well be that it is fear of 'giving oneself away' like this in the outgoing of our affections that prevents so many of us from expressing love for one another (as distinct from feeling it inwardly). One recalls C.S. Lewis's words on this subject: 'To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to be sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket - safe, dark, motionless, airless - it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, and irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe from the dangers and perturbations of love is hell.... We shall draw nearer to God, not by trying to avoid the sufferings inherent in all loves, but by accepting them and offering them to Him throwing away all defensive armour. If our hearts need to be broken, and if He chooses this as the way in which they should break, so be it.' Is this, then, why we so often withhold ourselves from others? Do we find the price of loving too great to pay?

3) 1:3-4

The phrase 'Whom I serve from my forefathers' is significant. Paul is linking together his experience under the old economy with that under the new, and maintaining that there was continuity between the two. Judaism, rightly understood, leads to and is fulfilled by and in the Christian message. But Judaism was not always rightly understood, and this was the case with Paul as well as with others, and it needed a revelation from God to make it clear to him that he had in fact misunderstood his own history and tradition. But what he is always concerned to point out (cf Acts 24:14) is that the Christian gospel affords the only true way of worshipping the God of his fathers. Paul's remembrance of his son in the faith is particularly moving, and it prompts us to reflect on the blessing it is for any servant of God to be upheld constantly by the prayers of some faithful prayer-partner. It is true that God sometimes seems to lay a particular burden of prayer on a believer's heart for some particular minister or missionary, and this is a service of intercession that can be quite priceless in the work of the gospel. The tears referred to in v 4 may have been occasioned by the peculiar difficulties Timothy was facing in his work at Ephesus, and seem to support the suggestion sometimes made that he tended towards despondency. If this is so, we may know just how much Paul's expression of love must have meant to him. It is a wondrous assurance to a timid and diffident spirit to know that one matters to people!

4) 1:5

We could link this verse with Paul's reference in v 3 to his forefathers, for here is the more immediate 'line of descent' in Timothy's spiritual history. Here is a noble succession indeed, and according to promise also, for God undertakes to bless to the third and fourth generation the faithfulness of His servants. One can think of prominent families in the Christian Church of whom this has been abundantly true - the Booths of the Salvation Army, for example, and the Hudson Taylor family in the C.I.M. Set the standard high at the fountain-head, and down the years the blessing will be reaped! We should notice also that as Timothy was converted during Paul's first missionary journey in AD 48 (see Acts 16:1; 14:6, 7) which was less than twenty years after our Lord's crucifixion, it is probable that his grandmother Lois's faith was pre-Pentecostal, and that she was a believer in the old economy. It is wonderful to think that she may have been like those we sometimes call 'the good of the land', such as the aged Simeon and Anna the prophetess (Luke 2), the shepherds in the fields, Mary and Joseph, who waited for the consolation of Israel and looked for redemption at Jerusalem. We need not doubt that large numbers of true believers in the old economy responded gladly to the message of the new and recognised in Christ the fulfilment of all their hopes and of the promise made to their fathers. This was the godly heritage Timothy received from his forebears.

5) 1:6

The 'gift of God' referred to here has to do with the divine endowment in Timothy's ordination, and earlier Notes in 1 Timothy on the subject should be consulted (see 1 Timothy 1:18 and 1 Timothy 4:14). The word 'stir up' means 'kindle' or 'stir up into flame', and would be the word to describe the action of breaking up a fire that had been banked up and left with the air vent closed for several hours. This is the first thing we do when we return home out of the cold winter air, and presently the flames are leaping up and a cheery warmth is being diffused throughout the room. The fire was not out, but it was not getting air or giving heat. It needed disturbing, in order to make it fulfil its true function. So it is, Paul means, in the spiritual life. The fire that has been implanted in us can never go out; but from time to time it needs to be stirred into flame. But the question arises. How is this to be done? Not indeed by emotional or psychological inoculation of the spiritual life, but through the exercise of the mind. Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:15, 'Meditate upon these things'. This is the only effectual way. When the knowledge of what we are in Christ and what God has made us in Him becomes quiescent in us, we need to do some hard thinking on the subject, in order that the sheer wonder and glory of it might grip us afresh. This is what the words of the well-known hymn are meant to convey:

'Think what Spirit dwells within thee'

The Psalmist said, 'While I was musing, the fire burned' (Psalm 39:3). It is when minds are gripped by the glories of grace that fires begin to burn afresh in the soul.

6) 1:7

The words 'given us' link with 'gift of God' in v 6, and define this. The 'given-ness' of our position in Christ (which Paul says is to be stirred up) is that of the Spirit in power, love and self-discipline (this is the same word as 'soberly' in Titus 2:12). For the gift of God to be stirred up in us means then to allow the wealth of what we have and are in Christ so to possess us that the natural craven spirit of fear and cowardice in us is set at nought and discounted as a force in our experience. To give way to the spirit of fear - or of black discouragement or despair - is to deny our calling and be untrue to our spiritual nature and inheritance in Christ. It is very wonderful to think that we do not have to cry to God for power in any particular situation, but realise rather that we are to call upon and make use of resources that He has already given us. Furthermore, it is the 'givenness' of the spirit of love that makes the divine command 'Thou shalt love' both meaningful and possible. How could we love as Christ loves, except it was given us? But since His love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, it is an inescapable necessity to show forth that love to others. All that is necessary is an iron grip on self, and this also is given us in the spirit of self-discipline! Well might Peter in his second epistle (1:3) remind us that 'His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness....' His resources are more than sufficient for our needs.

7) 1:8-10a

Declaring the whole counsel of God can be a very costly business, and it was not without a sense of pain and shrinking that Timothy had done so in Ephesus. The temptation is of course, to take lower ground in order to avoid something at least of the afflictions of the gospel (v 8). This is the force of Paul's earnest exhortation to Timothy in these verses. He bases his call for a resolute testimony not only on the fact that all the resources necessary for this have been given, but also on the eternal reality of the divine purposes. This, Paul means, is something to think of when we are trembling and shrinking from Christian duty. Our calling is rooted in the mists of eternity. The sovereign electing grace that all through life has brooded over us, long before it ever appeared likely that we would be saved at all, is the grace that will be near at hand to bless and help when we are called to bear costly witness to Christ. To know that from all eternity such suffering has been in the plan for us, and that it has its integral place in the fulfilment of the divine purposes of redemption - should not this be sufficient to undergird our faltering spirits and enable us to hold up our heads?

8) 1:10-11

Paul's statement about the abolition of death by Christ is one of the most glorious in all the gospel, but we need to understand aright what he means. To say that death is abolished in the gospel does not (and of course cannot) mean that it no longer exists, for death is still a reality for us. The word Paul uses here means 'to make idle or inactive, to make of no effect'. It is rendered as 'destroyed' in Romans 6:6, referring to 'the body of sin', and in Hebrews 2:14, referring to 'him that had the power of death, that is, the devil'. The meaning here, as in Romans 6 and Hebrews 2, is 'to deprive of its power'. Death has been stripped of its authority as the king of terrors; it has been demoted, reduced to the ranks, and is now, as has been said, no more than a porter at the gates of eternal life, made to usher God's people into the glory of His presence. Well might Paul say elsewhere in exultation, 'O death, where is thy sting?' (1 Corinthians 15:55). To put it another way, death that once dark and terrible prison of mankind, has itself now been put in prison, put safely out of the way so as to be unable to do any further harm to men, and awaits final execution in the morning without clouds, when Jesus comes to reign. Well, here is a threefold salvation in the death of Christ to ponder today - death, the body of sin, and the devil himself, all put out of action so as to be no longer fearful and intractable problems for God's people. How wonderful! 'Take, my soul, thy full salvation'!

9) 1:10-11

The 'abolishing' of death is the negative side of the work of Christ; the bringing of life and immortality to light is the positive. This is a great and wonderful word, but again we need to be clear about what Paul means. It is not the immortality of the soul as such that Paul is speaking of here, for this is not a specifically Christian idea, and not the characteristic note in the biblical doctrine. The immortality of the soul is a Greek theme; in Greek thought salvation was conceived of in terms of the escape of the soul from the body into immortality, through death. This is a mere doctrine of survival, something that 'comes after' death; but the biblical doctrine is very different, for it speaks not so much of life after death, but of a life from which death has been banished and plucked up by the roots, and from which the effects of death have been removed. But do we see what this means? What are the effects of death? Is not the terrible, tragic mark of death that it sunders what God put together, body and soul? This is what death means, the separation of the constitutive parts of man. And for salvation to be real, and really to be salvation, the sundered and separated elements must be reunited once more, and man reconstituted as man, body and soul, in perfect harmony. This is why the New Testament speaks of spiritual bodies in the resurrection. It is not our souls merely that are finally to be saved; it is we who are to be saved, and presented faultless in the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. Heaven is to be a place not of spirits or of ghosts, but of men, glorified men, with spiritual bodies that will be the fit and worthy vehicles of expression for glorified spirits. To speak of life after death merely can still mean that death triumphed in the end, and that this 'life after death' is a kind of consolation-prize for death's unfortunate victims. But to speak of the kind of immortality the New Testament invites us to understand is to speak of a life from which death and all its terrible effects have been once and forever removed, and men reconstituted in the glad image of God, as men, not spirits, forever. Well might Paul glory in such a doctrine, standing as he was at the gates of death, and therefore on the threshold of victory!

10) 1:12

Here is another mighty statement which, as so often with Paul's great and profound utterances, comes almost incidentally out of something else. He speaks of his present sufferings for Christ's sake, and relates them to the fact of his commission to preach the glorious gospel of life and immortality. It is the greatness of the honour he feels in having been so called that takes away any sense of shame or indignity (see Acts 5:41), for anything he is called to suffer is more than offset by the fact that he is in sweet and blessed fellowship with Christ. This is the real setting of these well-known words: 'I know', he says, 'Whom I have believed'. We must be careful to understand these words properly. We could expand the sentence to bring out the meaning more clearly, thus: 'I know Him in Whom I have believed'. It is not so much an article of faith that Paul is stressing, as a personal relationship. It is not what he has believed, but whom he has trusted that is being stressed. It is true, of course, that real biblical faith includes both a knowledge of saving truth - i.e. propositional faith (see Hebrews 11:6) - and living trust in a Person - i.e. faith as personal encounter. But sometimes the former is made to do duty for the latter; acceptance of certain doctrines is made the norm of Christian experience, and the result is unbiblical travesty of the gospel that leads people disastrously and sometimes fatally astray. Knowledge of the truth and understanding of the doctrine of salvation must always of course be a necessary preliminary which can lead to the all-important personal encounter with Christ - we meet with Him, after all, in and through the word of the gospel - but must never become a substitute for it. To know Him thus, then, is not only the heart of salvation, it is also to be undergirt and garrisoned against all discouragement, and strengthened and energised to stand in the evil day and, having done all, to stand.

11) 1:12

There is more yet to be considered in this verse. Paul speaks of that which he has committed unto Christ. The modern translations (NEB, J.B. Phillips, and the RSV) take this phrase differently from the AV, making it refer to something that had been entrusted to Paul, i.e. the gospel rather than what he had committed to God. In spite of this modern unanimity, however, we incline to think the AV is right, and that Paul is referring to what he had deposited with God, 'all my precious things which I have put under His care'. This then may be taken in the widest sense, to include his soul, his life, his spiritual children, the care of all the churches, his future - everything that was a concern to him. Viewed in this way, these words are elemental. If Christ is all-sufficient, it should be possible to commit anything to Him, in the confidence that He is able to keep and safeguard it. It is something to be sure of this when you are in prison awaiting execution, as Paul was! What a word this is for our needs today: He is able! Our part is to commit the matter to Him, His is to keep. He will not fail. He cannot fail, for He is God. Are we persuaded about this as Paul was?

12) 1:13-14

Paul continues his exhortation to Timothy with the injunction to keep before him a pattern of sound or healthy teaching (v 13) such as he had heard from Paul himself. Following as this does after vv 9-12 we may surely gather something of that pattern. The NEB suggests 'outline' instead of 'form' and this is useful in that it suggests a corpus of teaching which can be opened out and elaborated, basic essentials and fundamentals whose implications and logical conclusions can be worked out in detail and applied in practical life. The Apostle's words may indeed be taken as an exhortation to Timothy to stand in the true Pauline tradition, and this is surely what any teacher worth his salt would desire in one who meant so much to him as Timothy did. And even on the basis of what Paul has said in this epistle alone, it must be seen to have been a worthy and vital tradition in which to stand. The 'good thing' referred to in v 14 has been variously understood. Some refer it back to 1:6, and take it to mean the gift and anointing of the Spirit which is the divine endowment for service. If this is the meaning, it is one of the most solemnly important things that could ever be said to a servant of the Word, for without the unction grace that comes from God a ministry is doomed to failure and barrenness. The reference, however, may be to the gospel itself, in the sense of the faith once delivered to the saints. Paul says elsewhere (2 Corinthians 4:7) that 'we have this treasure in earthen vessels' and it may be this that he has in mind. If so, one readily sees the force of the injunction to keep it 'by the Holy Ghost', for this is the only way to remain faithful. Devoid of the Spirit, a man will not for long abide by the truth. All of which forcibly reminds us once again that deviation from the biblical position is not an intellectual but a moral issue; the Holy Ghost is given to them that obey God, and is grieved away not by a man's intellectual difficulties but by his disobedience.

13) 1:15

We should note the association of ideas between what is said here and in the previous verse. The implication seems to be that the Spirit had been grieved away from them with the result that these Asian believers had become disaffected from Paul in his hour of need. To be turned away from Paul may mean either disaffection from him personally or from all that he stood for (the Pauline 'tradition', see previous Note) or both. Indeed, the two are usually linked together, the latter leading to the former. Why had these men deserted Paul? Well, he was in prison and it was clear now to most people that he was about to be put to death by the Roman authorities, and obviously to be known as a friend of his was likely to be a hazardous and dangerous matter. Were they afraid of the possible consequences of being known as a friend of his? And is this why Paul was concerned to warn Timothy about the spirit of fear (v 7)? It seems likely; and we can understand something of the anguish and desolation Paul felt in being left alone by those who could have, and should have, stood by him in his evil hour. It is striking to see how the pattern of our Lord's sufferings is 'repeated' in His honoured servant - striking but not surprising in one who had once said 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus' (Galatians 6:17) and 'I fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church' (Colossians 1:24).

14) 1:16-18

The attitude of Onesiphorus is set in marked contrast to that of Phygellus and Hermogenes (v 15). This believer, with a large-hearted and selfless generosity of spirit, had not been afraid of any possible consequences of associating with the imprisoned apostle, but had searched the city for him, and paid him many a visit (v 16), bringing spiritual refreshment to him in the weariness of his last testing time. The references to 'the house of Onesiphorus' here and in 4:19 have led some to think that at the time of writing Onesiphorus had recently died. If so, then Paul's words in v 18 could be construed as being a prayer for the dead (this passage is in fact made much of by Roman Catholic scholars as a warrant for such a practice). But it is only a supposition to say that he was dead, and a rather slender one on which to build such a precarious doctrine as prayer for the dead, and the reference to his household could be explained quite adequately by the fact that he was at that time separated from them by reason of being in Rome or elsewhere. What is important here is not whether he was alive or dead, but that he should have been such a God-given help and encouragement to Paul in his time of need, and that his whole household was to share in the reward God would bestow on such kindness. There is such a thing as an entail of grace as well as the entail of sin. God visits the iniquities of the fathers to the third and fourth generations of their children, but He also blesses in the same way, and the family of Onesiphorus was to be enriched by the benediction of God because he had been faithful. God is not unrighteous to forget our labour of love (Hebrews 6:10).

15) 2:1-2

It is in relation to the contrast between 'those in Asia' who had forsaken Paul and Onesiphorus who had ministered so lovingly and faithfully to him that Paul says what he does in v 1. This is the force of the 'therefore'. It is as if he were saying to Timothy, 'Be like Onesiphorus, not like the others, Timothy, and do not let any natural timidity betray you into disloyalty'. The NEB translates v 1 thus: 'Now therefore, my son, take strength from the grace of God which is ours in Christ Jesus', and this serves to make it clear that 'being strong' is not something of ourselves, but possible only when we 'take' the position that is ours in Christ. In Christ Jesus we are in the centre of the grace of God, and only thus can we be what God has made us. There may be an additional incentive to faithfulness meant in the words 'my son', as if Paul were saying, 'If Onesiphorus, on whom I had no real right to call, proved faithful, surely you, who under God owe your spiritual life to me, are one to whom I have a right to appeal'. Those who have brought us to birth spiritually and nurtured us in the things of God have an inalienable right to our loyalty as well as our love.

Notice Paul's concern (v 2) that the gospel should be handed down in faithfulness in a true spiritual transmission. It is not merely the gospel, but his gospel, that he is concerned with. This is something that preachers can perhaps understand best. If a man believes that God has given him a distinctive message, one that he has in the deepest and truest sense made his own, and that he is willing to suffer and die for, the greatest desire of his heart will be not merely that others will be blessed by that message, but also, and supremely, that there will be those who will catch the vision in such a way that it will become their message too, which they in turn will pass on to others. Such is Paul's concern here.

16) 2:3-7

This is a chapter extraordinarily rich in metaphorical illustration as Paul proceeds to describe the nature of the service to which we are called in the gospel. First of all, that Christian is described as a soldier (v 3) and his service as warfare (v 4). The enemy ranged against him is threefold - the world (v 4), the flesh (v 22) and the devil (v 26), and the constant interplay of these forces against the believer makes the Christian life a warfare, keen, forceful, relentless, and from which there is no respite. There are no ex-servicemen in the army of the King of kings, and no discharge in this life! The hardness Paul mentions in v 3 is the inevitable accompaniment of this warfare. After all, the whole point of real soldiering is that you engage the enemy. There is no 'phoney war' here. The word translated 'hardness' is the same as that used in 1:8 and rendered there 'partaker of the afflictions of the gospel', and literally means 'to suffer ill with'. This is an integral element in the Christian life, and we must recognise that no one is excused or excluded from it. The very prefix of the Greek word, meaning 'together', suggests the common lot of all believers in this matter; and it also indicates the reality of our fellowship with one another in it. This is the note Peter strikes (1 Peter 5:9) when, speaking of the devil, he says, 'Whom resist, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world'. Well, it is something to know that we are not alone, even on the human level, in the hardness we encounter in the Christian battle!

17) 2:3-7

We concentrate on v 4 today, as Paul continues his military metaphor. The NEB renders the first part of the verse, 'A soldier on active service will not let himself be involved in civilian affairs'. This is more a paraphrase than a translation, but it does make the point that a soldier must give his military duties priority over every other loyalty, and this is really what Paul is concerned to convey with regard to the spiritual life. In this metaphor, as in those that follow, the idea conveyed is of a 'one-track life', with supreme concentration on the task in hand. A soldier will not soldier well if his mind is divided between the battle and other considerations. It is not a question of turning away from or cutting oneself away from the affairs of life: as Christians we have domestic and family responsibilities and commitments that we may not neglect - but of being disentangled from them, and detached from them in the midst of them. This is one of the most difficult, but also one of the most important things to learn in the Christian life. Such an attitude is expressed very clearly by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:12, 'All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any'. This detachment from the things of the world - the legitimate, not the illegitimate things, we should note - is possible only through attachment to Christ, and this is what Paul stresses in the latter part of the verse. Pleasing Him who has called us to the warfare is the first consideration. If we love Him supremely, the 'other things' will not have power to entangle us. What is more, it is love for Him, rather than natural qualities of strength or courage that makes for loyalty and endurance, however much hardness we may be called upon to endure. Nothing else - nothing - is big enough to keep us faithful. Love to Jesus is - everything.

18) 2:3-7

The metaphor changes in v 5 from warfare to the field of athletics and here again, as in v 4, it is the 'one-track life' that Paul is concerned to emphasise. Of this we may be sure, that the athletes who win gold medals in the Olympic Games do so only by the way of sacrifice and discipline. No one gets to world class without paying a very high price. This is what Paul is saying to Timothy: 'You are running the straight race for Christ. To win the prize you must be in good training, and to be in training you have got to be ruthless'. This is the point at which so many Christians baulk; they are not prepared to be ruthless with themselves. They are too self-indulgent. They live on the dreary plain when Christ is calling them to the heights. Someone has said, 'The great curse of the Christian Church today is not infidelity or failure, but low aim'. We are so often content with the mediocre, and it is because our religion is only part of our lives (albeit an important part) not the whole, and it has to share our loyalty with other interests and concerns. The athlete, however, relegates other interests and concerns to the background, not because they are wrong or bad in themselves, but because they are likely to militate successfully against his chance of winning the race. And anything will be sacrificed rather than allow that to happen. But many Christians do not get beyond asking rather querulously, 'What wrong is there in this for the Christian?' There is nothing wrong in it; God has given us richly all things to enjoy. But you do not run a race with your coat on. You do not want any encumbrances of that nature on the track. But there are Christians who will never make very much of the Christian race simply because they are cluttered up and encumbered with 'other things'.

19) 2:3-7

Again the metaphor changes and now in v 6 the Christian is compared to a husbandman. The word is suggestive of ploughing, harrowing, sowing, and reaping and brings to mind the well-known verse in Psalm 126, 'He that goeth forth and reapeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him'. There are two points to note. Firstly, as in the previous two metaphors, the idea of reward is prominent, and the sequence seems to be this (following Ellicott): 'Not every soldier wins his commander's applause, but only he who devotes himself heart and soul to his profession; not every athlete wins the prize, but only he who trains with anxious painful care; not every tiller of the ground gathers the earth's fruits, but only the patient toiler. So it must be in religious life'. It is this that Paul wishes Timothy to consider, and understand (v 7). Fruitfulness in spiritual work is dependent on hard, sacrificial toil. Secondly, there seems to be almost a hint, in the reference to partaking of the fruits, that Timothy, being the fruit of Paul's own costly toil, should recognise the duty of loyalty he owes to him for having begotten him in Christ. It is a measure of how deeply Paul had felt the defection of 'those in Asia' (1:15) that he should show such anxious concern about Timothy. One has only to recall our Lord's words, 'Will ye also go away?' (John 6:67) to realise how real and desolating is the hurt that such a desertion causes. What we must see from the illustration in the natural realm is that it is a violation of a fundamental spiritual principle for believers to be disloyal to their spiritual fathers, and all such violations incur the displeasure of the Lord.

20) 2:8-10

In the NEB v 8 is thus rendered: 'Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, born of David's line'. The meaning therefore seems to be that Paul is exhorting Timothy to remember how it was with Christ. 'Think how it was with our Lord, Timothy, in the warfare He waged, in the race He ran, in the good seed He sowed. He also endured hardship, and it led to - resurrection'. Timothy was to realise that the suffering and discipline through which he passed were part and parcel of the divine purpose, and were the crucible in which new life would be formed, for himself and others. Jesus, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and thus set the pattern for all who will serve Him. The reference to 'the seed of David' is meant to indicate that Jesus suffered in the historical context of the divine plan of the ages and fulfilled the destiny that was mapped out for Him in the purposes of God. In the same way Timothy was to see - as Paul undoubtedly saw in relation to his own experience (v 9, v 10) - that the hardness he endured had its contribution to make to the final victory of God, and that if he rose to meet his destiny in accepting this, resurrection would be the result. Paul's statement of the principle in v 10 is quite unmistakeable: what he endured for the elect's sake was directly related to the salvation they obtained. This surely puts the disciplines and sufferings of the Christian life in a new light, and in their proper perspective. God help us to see it!

21) 2:8-10

There is another valuable and important point to be considered here, before we leave these verses. In speaking of his sufferings even unto bonds, Paul is careful to stress that the word of God is not bound. Indeed it is not! This was literally true so far as Paul was concerned, for out of that prison house in Rome there came the wealth of the four prison epistles, as we believe, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. The plain truth is that the Church might never have had these priceless documents but for the fact that Paul was in bonds. So that, in a very real sense, the word of God is not only not bound when its ministers are put in prison, but is in fact set free and liberated by that imprisonment. This is but another statement of the principle we dealt with in the previous Note: death leads to resurrection. As Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 4:12, 'Death worketh'! This also throws another light on his statement in v 10 about the elect. It may well be that Paul means the elect who as yet had not been awakened and brought to a knowledge of salvation. One recalls the vision that came to Paul at Corinth when he was so discouraged and daunted by the greatness of the task that lay before him (Acts 18:10), when God said to him, 'I have much people in this city'. At that point many of them must still have been in the darkness of heathendom, and were elect only in the mind and purpose of God. But in the eighteen months that followed (Acts 18:11), they must surely have been brought into the light of the gospel. Paul's sufferings and tremblings in Corinth (see 1 Corinthians 2:3) 'liberated' the word of the gospel and set it among the Corinthians in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. O to understand and experience more deeply this mysterious and wonderful law of spiritual harvest!

22) 2:11-13

Here is another of the 'faithful sayings' (see 1 Timothy 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; Titus 3:8), and as we can see it relates particularly to what Paul has been saying to Timothy about the disciplines and sufferings of the Christian life in the previous verses. Its 'saying' is a notable and succinct statement of the doctrine of the cross as the principle of the believer's life. The first part (vv 11, 12a) states the positive side, the second (12b, 13) the negative, and these stand as stark alternatives, with no middle course. The two parts of the double statement in the first part are closely linked in thought, dying/living, and suffering/reigning. This is what Calvin calls the inward and outward aspects of participation in the death of Christ. The pattern of dying with Christ has to be worked out in our Christian experience both inwardly and outwardly. There is the inward process of mortification, the denial of self and the renunciation of the works of the flesh (cf Romans 6:3 ff, Colossians 3:5) - this is the 'dying-with-Christ and living-with-Him' aspect; but there is also an outward process of mortification to be undergone in union with Christ, and this is described in the New Testament as sharing in the sufferings of Christ (cf Romans 8:17, 18; 2 Corinthians 4:10; Philippians 3:10). It should be clear that the inward and the outward are inseparably bound together as two differing aspects of the same reality, not the one representing a difference in quality and intensity from the other. It is true that 'living' and 'reigning' with Christ could be distinguished in other contexts (see 1 Corinthians 3 and the question of rewards) but this does not seem to be in Paul's mind here.

23) 2:11-13

There is difference of view in the interpretation of the second group of statements (vv 12b, 13). The first phrase, 'If we deny Him, He will deny us' seems so harsh to some that they recoil from the very thought, and invoke the everlasting mercy as proof that it cannot mean what it appears to mean. This is but a variation on the theme that since God is a God of love, hell is unthinkable. Not to spend time demonstrating the illogicality of such a standpoint (it was the loving Jesus, not Paul, who warned most of the terrible reality of hell and eternal loss) we simply note that the text here is so unequivocal and categorical that there can be no mistaking its meaning. It is the second phrase, however, 'If we believe not (better, if we are faithless, or unfaithful) He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself', that is really open to misinterpretation. Some understand these words, as Ellicott remarks, 'as containing soothing, comforting voices for the sinner, for the faithless Christian who has left his first love', as if what Paul had in mind was to proclaim that the divine mercy is greater than human sin. This is undoubtedly true, and no one exulted more in this than Paul, but this is surely not his point here. The very balance of the statements he makes, apart from anything else, should make it plain that it is a warning he is giving in these words, a solemn reminder that faithfulness and faithlessness are not all one to a holy God, and that it costs dearly to fall into and remain in a backslidden state (cf Psalm 18:26).

24) 2:14

The words 'these things' refer to the death-resurrection pattern which Paul has been expounding in 8-13. That there is a constant need to underline this teaching can be seen from Paul's repeated emphasis upon it in his epistles; he at all events had no doubts as to its central and cardinal importance for spiritual life. But there is another fact to be borne in mind; it is that such teaching, being radical and costly, often tends to have only lip-service given to it instead of heart-obedience, and when this happens 'a form of godliness' emerges which 'denies the power thereof' (see 3:5). This may be what Paul has in mind when he speaks of the danger of striving about words to no profit. Any living doctrine can be reduced to being merely a subject for discussion and debate or argument instead of a power to be experienced in the life, and it is particularly tragic when a pattern of teaching which God means to be emancipating and energising should be evacuated of its power and made lifeless by being bandied about on irreverent lips as an exercise in spiritual virtuosity. A knowledge of the Scriptures and of scriptural doctrine that is devoid of the Spirit's unction grace is not only useless, but dangerous for the spiritual life, catastrophic indeed if we take the Greek word for 'subverting' literally, for it is ultimately destructive of any upbuilding of the Christian life in terms of real character.

25) 2:15

Timothy is to give diligence to show himself approved unto God. The word for 'approved' here is the opposite of that in 1 Corinthians 9:27, translated 'a castaway' or 'disqualified', and this perhaps affords a commentary on the meaning of the diligence that is required. Certainly, the man who 'keeps under his body, bringing it into subjection' will be approved of God. The thought of divine approval here is the same as that in v 4, where the soldier is said to be supremely concerned to please Him Who has called and chosen him. Here, once again, the metaphor changes to that of a workman. The word in the Greek gives us our English word 'energy', and suggests the hard labour involved in rightly dividing the word of truth. Those who think that this is an odd thing to say have misunderstood what real ministry is. It takes all that a man has of intellectual and spiritual equipment and resources to dig the gold of the living Word out of the Scriptures of truth. No mere scratching of the surface will suffice for long, if the souls of God's people are to be enriched and upbuilt. Nor is this all, even when such mining has been done, for the word of truth must be rightly divided. The word used here means 'to cut straight', and is used of a plough driving a straight furrow, and of a road maker making his road straight, of a stone-mason squaring and cutting a stone in order to fit it into its proper place. The meaning is clear enough: the minister of the word must get right to the heart of its meaning, and communicate that meaning in a way that cannot fairly be misunderstood. This is no unnecessary warning; it is possible so to clothe the living Word of the gospel with fine, elegant language in such a way that its cutting edge is taken away and it is rendered innocuous, just as it is possible to preach the eternal verities in such a woolly-headed and nebulous way that no one quite knows what is the point that is being made. 'Get to the point, Timothy', Paul is saying, 'make the message clear and plain'.

26) 2:16-18

There seems to be a contrast intended between the workman ploughing a straight furrow through the Word of God (v 15) unto godly upbuilding of His people and the advance or progress into godliness that is the inevitable result of profane and empty utterances. The word 'increase', meaning 'advance' is said to have been used originally of the pioneer cutting his way through brushwood (Souter), and this may serve to remind us that it is not a negative question or mere drifting into godliness through neglect, but rather of being driven by a positive and malignant power. This is borne out in v 17, where 'canker' translates the Greek word 'gangrene'. Paul has two things in mind here, it seems. This canker makes havoc in a man's own life, and this would be sufficiently obvious in Hymenaeus and Philetus; but it also grievously harms the life of the fellowship, eating into its life and vigour with disastrous consequences, overthrowing the faith of some. It is well for us to stand back for a moment, and see this grim progression, from striving about words to no profit, irreverently and unspiritually handling the Word of life (v 14), to the cancerous progress of an evil, destroying principle in the life of the fellowship. Nothing could emphasise more graphically the dangers attendant upon handling the word of God deceitfully. How needful to have men in the Church of God who are able rightly to divine the Word of truth!

27) 2:18

A word is necessary about the particular nature of the heresy mentioned here. Hymenaeus and Philetus were asserting that the resurrection was past already. This can only mean that they spiritualised the idea of resurrection, asserting that resurrection for the believer was in fact simply his regeneration, his 'rising again with Christ' to newness of life. It is of course true that the believer's regeneration is spoken of in the New Testament in terms of a resurrection, and this is the element of truth in the heresy that would make it subtle and dangerous (many scriptures could be quoted in support of it!). But this is not what the New Testament means by the resurrection, and to maintain so is indeed heretical. The Christian doctrine is the resurrection of the body and this is solidly based on the fact of our Lord's bodily resurrection. It is significant perhaps that this last is also questioned by some today (perhaps it was then, also) who speak of His rising again in spiritual rather than in corporal terms. What we must realise is that the reality of Christ's risen, eternal, indestructible manhood is an integral and fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith, and that it is the basis and guarantee of our bodily resurrection. It is men that Christ redeems, not spirits, and in the final consummation they will be seen to be men, with glorified bodies, as Christ's human body is glorified, and not disembodied spirits. This is the resurrection to which the apostolic writings bear witness, and it is indubitably not past, but future (see Philippians 3:20, 21 and Note on 2 Timothy 1:10).

28) 2:19

The statement made here is full of allusions that we must seek to understand if we are to grasp the meaning and significance of Paul's point. The RSV renders the first phrase thus: 'But God's firm foundation stands', and the NEB, 'But God has laid a foundation, and it stands firm'. In view of what has gone before, particularly with reference to the resurrection, it must surely be clear that the foundation referred to is that of the Church built upon the fact of the resurrection of Christ. It is as if Paul were saying, 'In spite of all the false teaching of those who are denying bodily resurrection, let it be known that this is in fact the very foundation of the gospel, that on which God is building His Church.' With regard to the seal, or inscription referred to, commentators point out that it was an ancient custom to inscribe on a building or monument an inscription which told of its origin and purpose (cf Revelation 21:14). On this building of God, built of living stones, are two inscriptions, one of comfort and hope, reminding men that God would ever know His own, the other of duty, reminding men that God's own had no share in unrighteousness (so Ellicott). It is thought that there is a reference to the story of the gainsaying of the sons of Korah in Numbers 16, where two verses in particular, 5 and 26, seem to answer to the twofold seal Paul speaks of here. The reference must then be to Hymenaeus and Philetus; and true believers, who name the Name of Christ and are sealed unto God, are to dissociate themselves from them and from all who by their heretical teaching undermine the foundations of the faith.

29) 2:20-21

There are two possibilities of interpretation here. The first is to take 'the great house' to refer to 'the visible Church' or 'Christendom'. If this is what Paul means, then what he says parallels our Lord's teaching in the parable of the drag-net (Matthew 13:47 ff), which speaks of an ultimate separation of good and evil at the end. On first thoughts this seems to be the most likely interpretation; but if we apply it to the situation of which Paul is writing, it would mean that Hymenaeus and Philetus must be regarded as unbelievers. But in 1 Timothy 1:20 Paul's deliverance of the former to Satan was interpreted, it will be remembered, as a solemn discipline upon a believer, not an unbeliever. This leads us, then, to the second possible interpretation which is that Paul has in mind the honour and dishonour of believers within the true Church. The contrast he makes here between the different kind of vessels, gold and silver on the one hand, wood and earth on the other, certainly recalls a similar contrast in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, where he is thinking of reward and loss for believers, not the separation of believers from unbelievers. Other references to this subject are found in 1 Corinthians 9:27 ('castaway' meaning 'disqualified') and 1 John 2:28 (where 'ashamed' is in some measure analogous to 'dishonour'). This seems to accord better with the general meaning of Paul's words in these verses. Timothy, by building the gold, silver and precious stones of true Christian character, will be a vessel unto honour, useful to God and usable in God's hands. The others, made useless by their unfaithfulness and sin, are disqualified and shall suffer loss, and be ashamed before Him at His coming.

30) 2:22-23

But Hymenaeus and Philetus are not the only enemies Timothy will have to beware of; there are the inward foes he has to do battle with, and separation from the former will suffice little if the latter are not brought into subjection. 'Lusts' need not be thought of as only referring to the baser passions and desires, although these are included; the biblical word 'concupiscence' has a wide connotation including such things as pride and ambition and lust for power. But v 22 affords us an important pointer to success in this battle. The best defence in the spiritual life is often attack, and we should note very particularly how positive Paul's injunction to Timothy is; he is to be more concerned with the pursuit of righteousness, faith, love, peace than with being negatively preoccupied with the temptations of the flesh. The parable of the unclean spirit returning to a man (Matthew 12:43-45) has relevance in this connection. Chalmers' great phrase, 'The expulsive power of a new affection' reminds us that the battle is won by displacement, and that 'youthful lusts' can be set at nought when mind and heart are captivated by the virtue and power of the things that are lovely and of good report. This 'outward-looking' attitude is further emphasised in the words, 'with them that call on the Lord....' It will be easier, Paul means, to be outward-looking in the fellowship of other believers than alone. This is apparently not always easy for tormented believers to grasp, for in their torment they tend to withdraw from fellowship into a lonely agony that God means them to share with others. The biblical doctrine of the communion of the saints in its encouraging and strength-giving aspects is not always accorded the place it ought to have in the thinking of the Church.

31) 2:24-25

Paul here instructs Timothy as to the proper attitude of the servant of God in face of foolish and unlearned questions (v 23). If this does not woo and win men to the truth and from disputation, avoidance is the only other alternative. We must not, however - nor must the disputers - confuse meekness with weakness. Paul is not advocating any spirit of weak acquiescence or concession to the disputers in the hope that conceding to them will placate them. This, in fact, proves in experience to be a false hope; indeed it makes matters worse. To 'go the second mile' and 'turn the other cheek' in such cases is a misunderstanding of Christian truth, and worsens the situation. There is need for discernment, of course, when to adopt such firmness, and the indication is given when we realise that what we are dealing with is not merely disputations but disputatious people. We should note that when it is possible to do something with such people, it is through the Word and its teaching that it is done (v 25). The best antidote to error is always truth. Paul says that they 'oppose themselves'. The 'middle voice' of the verb he uses indicates that they are adversely disposed against themselves as much as against the truth, and seems to suggest the idea of divided hearts (cf 'if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand', Mark 3:25, and 'a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways', James 1:8). Disputatious people are at odds with their own destiny. The point Paul seems to make in v 25b is that when a man strays from the truth he cannot come back when he chooses. We have no guarantee that when we sin we will be able to return to where we once were. Repentance is God's gift, not a natural human attribute to be exercised at will. This is the force of the 'peradventure'. We may not presume on divine grace.

32) 2:26

What Paul says here in describing the state of such disputatious persons makes it clear why it is so much wasted effort to argue with them. For the word rendered 'recover themselves' has the meaning of 'sobering up after intoxication' and 'coming to their senses'. One does not argue or reason with a drunk man! This is but a variation of the apostle's words in 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4 about the god of this world blinding the minds of them that believe not. The twin ideas of stupefaction and ensnarement in the working of the devil in a man's soul are given very graphic expression in the illustration of drunkenness which makes it very clear that both are inseparably connected with one another. Mere words, then, are useless to effect any sobering influence upon such minds; only the powerful, living Word of God itself can avail. The last phrase of the verse is difficult. To whom do the words 'him' and 'his' refer? The AV obviously refers both to the devil, but the Greek is less unambiguous than this might suggest, for the word for 'him' is different from that for 'his'. Furthermore, 'at his will' is better rendered 'unto his will'. This has led some commentators to differ from the AV interpretation, and to make it read thus: '... that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil - having been held captive by him - to do His (God's) will' (so Ellicott), or '... that they who had been taken captive by the devil may recover themselves out of his service, so as to serve the will of God' (so Expositors Greek Testament). Whichever interpretation we take, it is well to remember that the devil has a will as well as God, and that if we do not serve the latter's, we shall be made to do the former's. We must necessarily be captive to the one or the other.

33) 3:1

It will be useful first of all to read through this chapter in its entirety, before turning to detailed examination. It will be seen that it divides naturally into two parts, the first nine verses being devoted to the nature of the perilous times of which Paul speaks in 1, and the remainder of the chapter pointing to the only real and effective safeguard against them. The words 'This know also' stand in contrast, as it were, over against the possibility expressed ('peradventure') in 2:25, 26. It is as if Paul were reminding Timothy that such situations would arise in which men will be so sold to the devil that it may become impossible to win them back. It is for us to note that the 'last days' refer not to those immediately prior to our Lord's coming - Paul was not concerned with any far-away reality, but something very real to him - but to the wider and more general use of that phrase as applied to the day of grace (cf Acts 2:17). This means that his warning is applicable as urgently to us as to Timothy. One recalls the teaching of Revelation 12:12 about the wrath of the devil when he knows his time is short. The attitude of the believer must therefore be one of constant watchfulness, like a soldier making his way through a minefield fraught with hidden danger. With what diligence and seriousness would he mark every step, longing all the while for the end of the road! It is often with a far different spirit that we make our way through our Christian life today, and this may serve to explain the considerable casualty list among believers. Watch and pray.

34) 3:2-4

What a frightful catalogue! This then, is what it means to be taken captive by the devil and ensnared by his wiles. We should bear in mind that this discussion started with the thought of believers who were out of joint with God; and it is very startling to realise that it is still believers that Paul has in mind in these terrible verses. We find ourselves protesting that surely this could not be, until we look again at the list and see that there is not one of these characteristics but may exist in the context of the Church's life. Is love of self an impossibility, unknown in our evangelical testimony? Is there no covetous 'rat-race' among Christians? Boasting and pride? Unthankfulness? Are there no pleasure-loving believers? Those who have been beguiled from the simplicity of Christ by their love for and preoccupation with the good things of life? Let us beware of using such a catalogue as a description of the ungodliness of the world around us, and miss its challenge to ourselves. We should note also that the first phrase 'lovers of their own selves' is the bitter root from which all the others spring. This is the essence, the heart, of sin, the ultimate blasphemy against God in the life of man. It is when love of self displaces love of God, which is man's true destiny, that all other evils are born in man's experience. This is why nothing less than constant and continuing crucifixion of self will suffice to keep us where we ought to be. Let us make no mistake about this. If we baulk at the cross in our lives, there is not a part of this terrible indictment that could not become true of us.

35) 3:5

This well-known verse confirms what was said in yesterday's Note about the terrible characteristics in v 2-4 being applicable to the Church as much as to the world, for Paul speaks of them in the context of 'a form of godliness', which denies 'the power thereof'! Godliness, then, is a power not a form, a living reality, not an outward performance. It concerns not what we do, but what we are. It was our Lord's condemnation of the Pharisees of his day that they had become so exclusively concerned with outward observance at the expense of inward reality that the life of the Spirit was driven out of them. Appearing to be holy became so much more important to them than being holy - and for this reason: the form of godliness, however great a bondage it brought upon them, cost them so much less than the crucifixion of self. Power costs, and many believers are not willing to pay the price that God requires. Peter said 'God giveth the Holy Ghost to them that obey Him' (Acts 5:32), and the word he uses here is one which indicates the obeisance which a subject gives to his liege lord and king. It is a question of giving the Redeemer His crown rights in our lives. One recalls the story of the missionary whose life showed a radiance and power such that one nearby was constrained to exclaim, 'I would give everything I had to have a testimony like that', to which the missionary quietly rejoined, 'That is exactly what it cost me'. The price to be paid for refusing to pay the price of true godliness is that our lives will be an empty shell, hollow and pith-less, and constantly in danger of deteriorating into one or more of the terrible patterns Paul refers to in vv 2-4. It may cost much to take up the Cross and follow Christ, but in the end it costs more not to.

36) 3:6-7

Here is a sorry picture indeed! Paul is speaking of those who have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof, and they are intent on working (as they think) for God, not realising that being first of all lovers of their own selves their motives in reaching these contacts referred to in vv 6, 7 are hopelessly mixed and suspect. They look (consciously or unconsciously) for easy prey in gullible and easily swayed women, unstable emotionally and apt to succumb to various kinds of psychological pressure, and lead them captive in an unhealthy association in which the influence of a strong personality has become a substitute for the healthy and emancipating power of the Spirit of God. When one hears how some people almost swoon in ecstasy when they hear a preacher whom they treat almost as a spiritual 'pin-up', one is forced to accept the Apostle's estimate of them. They are silly women, and they are led astray. Naturally, they are ever learning, but never coming to a knowledge of the truth, because it is not the truth they are really interested in, but the man. Nor is it spiritual help they want, but spiritual help from him. It hardly needs to be said that real spiritual work is impossible in such a situation. What is required is the down-to-earth ministrations of some godly woman to make short shrift of their foolish infatuations and put some sense into their heads. How careful we must be, preacher and hearer alike, that our motives in the gospel are pure and true!

37) 3:8-9

Jannes and Jambres, mentioned nowhere else in Scripture by name, are said by Jewish and early Christian tradition and legend to have been two of the magicians who vied with Moses in the court of Pharaoh in the exercise of miraculous power. Paul's use of the ancient tradition is very striking; as they withstood Moses, so those of whom he has been speaking resist the truth. The association of ideas is very impressive: men come to a form of godliness that denies the power thereof by resisting the truth. It is the corruption of their minds, not any accidental circumstances, that lies at the root of their trouble. The NEB renders 'men of corrupt minds' as 'men who have lost the power to reason', and this may be a pointer to how the terrible deadness of spirit has come upon them. When men resist the truth, their minds become twisted, and they are no longer able to think straight. Having refused the appeal of spiritual truth, they lose the ability to think spiritually altogether. As Paul puts it in Romans 1:28, 'Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind'. To refuse to think through the things of the Faith leads finally to being no longer able to do so. The folly (criminal, not ignorant, since resistance of the truth is involved) of such people shall be ultimately revealed for what it is. We cannot hope to conceal indefinitely the fact that our godliness is but form, with no power in it. It is inevitable that sooner or later, the truth will out.

38) 3:10-11

Paul now proceeds to contrast Timothy with those whom he has been discussing, and shows us in the very pattern of life, that the young servant of God was showing forth the only effective answer to the dangers and hazards of the end-time perils. This is not brought out clearly enough in the AV translation, where 'fully known' in v 10 is better rendered 'closely followed'. Furthermore, the verb is in a tense which indicates that Paul is reminding Timothy of the definite occasion in his experience when he identified himself with the Apostle and his gospel. Paul is in fact appealing for the loyalty of the young man in the way of life that had first drawn him in the gospel. It is as if he were saying, 'Be ye a follower of me, even as I also am of Christ'. And, as we have already seen in this epistle (see Note on 2:1, 2), this is something that every true preacher should be able to say. If he is gripped by a vision and a purpose, surely it is natural for him to want others who he shepherds in the Lord to share that vision, and be gripped by the same purpose. The reference to his sufferings at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra rather than elsewhere (he could have quoted many other bitter experiences) is explained by the fact that it was during his visit to these places that Timothy was decisively influenced for Christ. All that Paul has shown forth in life, teaching and afflictions must inevitably 'repeat' itself in the experience of Timothy. It is of this that he reminds him, and to this that he summons him in these verses.

39) 3:12

This is a verse which even apart from its context, requires to be underlined deeply in the minds of all believers. The connection with what has just been said is surely plain: Timothy is not to think that the afflictions of the gospel are peculiar to particular apostles and specially selected disciples. It is the common lot of all who seek to live godly lives that they shall suffer persecution. This in fact is the constant atmosphere in which the Christian life is to be lived. True godliness of life 'sets off' evil in men's hearts, just as the presence of Christ drew out the demons lurking in men's lives into the open. Maintaining the 'status quo' becomes an impossibility where there is a living witness. As the hymn puts it, 'Some will hate thee, some will love thee, some will flatter, some will slight'. To live a godly life will inevitably draw the fire of the enemy, and we must not be surprised when it comes. Not that we are to look for suffering and persecution in the sense of going out of our way to provoke it - there is no place in Christian thinking for morbid and unhealthy attitudes, nor will it ever be necessary to ask for persecution. It will come, as surely as night follows day (an apposite metaphor, in relation to any discussion of the conflict between darkness and light! cf Acts 14:22; 1 Thessalonians 3:4, and John 15:18-16:3, also John 16:33b).

40) 3:13

If we take these words as being connected with the previous verse, then what we are meant to understand is that the persecution we are called on to endure as believers will increase and intensify as time goes on, and that it will become more and more sinister and deceptive. The word 'seducer' has the force of 'deceiver', and this should underline for us the fact that the greatest danger of all is to be so influenced by deceiving spirits that we are not conscious of being deceived at all. Paul's reference is especially to false teachers, who even then were troubling the Church, and of these he says that they both deceive and are themselves deceived. Their own deception comes first; they are made into tools of Satan, and one cannot emphasise too strongly that this is through their own moral failure. Becoming a dupe of the devil is not 'something that could happen to anyone' in the sense that it is purely accidental when it does so; rather, it is something that is likely to happen when by our carelessness and folly we lower our defences and allow him place in our lives. To see this happen, and then to see the 'missionary zeal' with which the deceived one enthuses in his appointed work of deceiving others is very frightening indeed.

41) 3:14-15

Paul's exhortation to Timothy to continue in the things he had learned stands in marked contrast to the downward movement of declension represented in the career of the evil men and deceivers (v 13). Paradoxically, however, the word 'continue' is not a word of movement, but one which literally means 'to stand firm'. The metaphor Paul is using is that of steadfastness and immovability (cf 1 Corinthians 15:58), of standing firm on the rock and refusing to budge while the adverse tides hurled up by the storm are sweeping around. What Timothy is to stand firm in and on are the things he has learned and been assured of. This is the 'sine qua non' of a bedrock faith and experience. A man must be sure of where he stands. When he is, to stand there means that he is drawing constantly on the divine resources available to him in his position in Christ. The word 'whom' is in the plural, which means that it refers not only to Paul, who had been Timothy's father in the faith, and perhaps not even primarily to him, but to his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. It was they who had taught him the Scriptures from childhood, and not to continue in the things he had learned would have been to be false to all his training and instruction from earliest years, false to the destiny for which he was bespoken by the prayers and tears of his mother and grandmother. Then comes the wonderful statement about the power of the Scriptures - 'the Holy Scriptures...are with power...' (as the word may be literally rendered). To this we shall turn tomorrow, in commenting on the next two verses.

42) 3:16-17

This wonderful statement, of such cardinal significance for any true doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures poses a problem of translation. Some modern renderings, and many commentators, read it thus: 'Every Scripture which is God-breathed is also profitable'. This would very clearly prevent us from holding the inspiration of the Scriptures as a whole, for such a rendering implies that there are other Scriptures (in the Bible) which are not God-breathed, and therefore not inspired. It is fair to say that grammatically the Greek could in itself be translated either way. What is significant, however - and quite decisive in prompting us to accept the AV rendering - is that there are a number of other instances in the New Testament in which this particular construction is used, and in each case the proper translation is clearly to place the verb between the subject of the sentence and the particular adjective (cf Romans 7:12; 1 Corinthians 11:30; 2 Corinthians 10:10; 1 Timothy 1:15; 1 Timothy 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:4; 1 Timothy 4:9; Hebrews 4:13), just as the AV here puts the verb 'is' between 'all scripture' and 'given by inspiration of God'. It is odd that the scholars want to alter the method of translation only in this one instance, and one is tempted to think the desire to do so is prompted by the determination to avoid the implications of the AV rendering. We take, then, this statement as it stands in the AV, as an expression of the inspiration, and therefore the authority, of the Scriptures, and recognise that it is because this is true that Paul could say in v 15 that the holy Scriptures are with power.

43) 3:16-17

The phrase 'given by inspiration of God' is but one word in the Greek, 'theopneustos', which means 'God-breathed' not indeed in the sense that God has breathed into these writings His holy breath, but rather that these writings have been 'out-breathed' by Him. Paul does not pause here to explain how this mystery takes place, nor should we assume that what he says excludes the instrumentality of the various writers of Old and New Testaments (it does not, and indeed cannot) for it is still true, as Peter says (2 Peter 1:21) that 'holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost'. This word of Peter's is a contribution to the mystery of how inspiration takes place, but Paul is simply concerned here with the fact, which he states with great directness and with a sublime majesty. Given this truth, it should be clear that everything else he says about the Scriptures' power and virtue and sufficiency for the spiritual life of the believer (vv 16b, 17) necessarily follows. If the Scriptures are really 'God-breathed', then we can scarcely think that they could do less than this for our lives.

44) 4:1-2

There is a double significance in these solemn words. On the one hand they stand in immediate relation to what Paul has just said about the sufficiency of the Scriptures to remake men's lives; on the other hand, the charge is given in view of the general emphasis throughout the whole of the previous chapter. Paul has been speaking of perilous times, and has indicated that the only effectual answer to them lies in the Word of God with its inner dynamic, which is the Spirit. The solemnity of the charge lies both in the fact that all our service - not preaching only - is against the background of eternity, and involves eternal issues, and in the fact that that service is rendered in the presence of God now. This applies indeed as much to Paul as to Timothy, and explains the urgency and forthrightness of his charge to the young man, for not to charge him would have been to fail in his own duty in the sight of God. This double reason is deeply impressive, and must surely constitute a supreme incentive to faithfulness in the service of God, reminding us inexorably, whenever we might be tempted to preach less than the whole counsel of God because of the opposition it could stir up, that we have to give answer not to men but to God. Well might Paul say elsewhere, 'Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel' (1 Corinthians 9:16)! We must, however, continue thinking of this apostolic injunction in the next Note.

45) 4:1-2

These words bring us right to the heart of the fundamental things of the faith and the service of God. Paul's command is based, as we have seen, on what he has said in 3:15-17; it also reflects Christ's commission in Mark 16:15 and both statements underline the primacy of preaching in the work of the gospel. This is the instrument above all others which God has put in our hands for the establishing and extension of the Kingdom, the weapon of which it is said that it is mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. Since this is so, it should surely be clear that the main emphasis in the ministry and indeed in the life of the Church in general should lie here. It is only too plain that this is not always the case; plain also that its urgent priority very readily tends to be submerged in a multitude of 'other things', some worthy and good, some less so, but all deadly dangerous in the time and attention they succeed in filching from the 'one thing needful'. This is so important a consideration that we must spend further time on it in the next Note.

46) 4:1-2

Following upon what was said in the previous Note, we need to be quite clear in this whole matter: all else in the life of the Church ought to be subservient to the labour of preaching and its necessary adjuncts of spiritual counselling and real pastoral work. Ministers themselves should make it their business to see to it that whatever else suffers in the busy daily round of their work (there will always be more to do than can be done by one man) the time that requires to be given to preparation of heart and mind for the pulpit will not suffer, but be kept sacrosanct. And congregations also, if they are wise, will see to it that they do not by their demands upon their minister make this a practical impossibility for him. If they do not, they will find that the practical effectiveness and fruitfulness of his work will become subject to the law of diminishing returns, and a pattern will emerge in which more and more activity will produce less and less spiritual vitality and progress until the point is reached when the true work of the gospel is relegated to the dull monotony of a shorter and shorter service on Sunday, that has come to be regarded more and more as an optional 'extra', and the real interest of large numbers lies in the week-day peripherals of the congregation's 'social' life. The barrenness of a busy life - in a minister or a congregation - is a terrible thing to behold.

47) 4:3-4

We find that in the latter part of the previous Note we have almost anticipated what Paul says in v 3. The time does come when men will not endure sound doctrine, and although Paul is doubtless thinking in particular of the 'perilous times' of 3:1, it is pertinent for us to note that failure to preach it is often responsible for the loss of appetite that characterises so much of the Church's life today. We are left of God for want of seeking Him. Conversely, however - and this is surely the hope for today - the Word when preached in the power of the Spirit does create its own appetite in the hearts of men. Sadly, however, not all will allow the Word to do this creative work in their hearts; there are other competitors in the field to claim their loyalty and allegiance. The word 'lusts' need not be taken in our modern narrow sense of the term, but it does serve in this form to underline the ugliness of the God-denying attitude in the hearts of those who refuse the Lord. For ugly it is, even when it is dressed and veneered in religious garb, as Paul indicates here that it is. If 'itching ears', as is likely, indicate a desire to be tickled and entertained, then it is clear that Paul's strictures can certainly be applied in the context of religious life. There is much in evangelical life today that makes its appeal to itching ears, much of merely carnal entertainment value, designed consciously or unconsciously to titillate the carnal palate of its devotees, providing a soul-destroying substitute for the death they have refused to die. This in measure accounts for the decline in evangelical testimony from the integrity of true and honourable exposition of the Word to the adulteration of alphabetic puerilities that is apparently the criterion of acceptability and sometimes even of orthodoxy. How are the mighty fallen! But let us remember this: a gospel that does not crucify is a gospel that cannot save.

48) 4:5

In view of what has been said, Paul's warning here is all the more solemn and urgent. 'Watch thou', he says, 'let nothing deflect you from the centralities of the gospel. Keep near its heart, which is the cross. Remember that all the enemy's wiles are directed towards one objective in the Christian's life - to get him away from the cross. But stand firm, whatever afflictions may come to you. And come they will, for it will cost you to keep near the cross, both outwardly and inwardly. You will lose your popularity with worldly and carnal believers if you stab their consciences with your faithful word, and they will slight you and despise you, and heap their reproaches upon you. That will be part of your outward affliction. And Satan will not be slow to stir up inward corruption. The 'cross-life' will mean many a lonely wrestling. But hold fast, Timothy; even if it breaks you, no matter, your name will be Israel, and you will be a prince with God. Such, we may take it, is Paul's emphasis here. Withal, Timothy is to do the work of an evangelist, and so fulfil his calling (this is the meaning of the Greek). But what is it to do the work of an evangelist but to preach the Word? Lock suggests that the emphasis here is on the evangel rather than on the man, as if to say, 'Do the work of one who has a gospel, as opposed to fables (v 4), to preach'. This must surely be understood as something more than merely preaching with an evangelistic emphasis; it is to preach the whole counsel of God. If 'all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable', then all of it, not some only, must be preached, if a whole Christ, and therefore a whole salvation, is to be communicated to men. Nothing less than this can be said to be fulfilling the calling, and doing the work, of one who has a gospel to preach.

49) 4:6-7

It would be difficult to find words more moving, more triumphant than these. What a wonderful note on which to end his long and arduous missionary career! The language in v 6 belongs to the Old Testament idea of temple sacrifice, and of the libation poured out upon it on the altar as the final act in the ritual. Paul had spoken before in similar terms to the saints at Philippi, during his first imprisonment in Rome (Philippians 2:17), when a martyr's death was a possibility for him. Here, however, it was more than a possibility, it was imminent, and indeed was even then beginning (the Greek could be rendered, 'I am already being offered, or poured out'). And still the note of calm joy and expectation as in Philippians. In the old economy, the libation or drink-offering (of Numbers 15:7) was for a sweet savour unto the Lord, and we cannot doubt that this precious life even then being poured out was just that to God. Paul's supreme passion in life was to live for God's glory and be well-pleasing to Him, and how he must have crowned that holy desire in death! 'Departure' (not 'end', for no life that is hid with Christ in God shall ever come to an end!) is a word used of the raising of a ship's anchor and the loosing of the mooring cables prior to setting sail, and also of a soldier striking his tent. Either picture is full of meaning from the spiritual point of view: the sailor is setting sail at last for home waters, and the soldier has come to the end of the long campaign. To know what lay ahead, of welcome, rest, and reward, as Paul assuredly did, would be enough to offset the final sharp thrust of pain and suffering with eager expectancy and hope.

50) 4:7

The language of v 7 would seem to incline us to the 'soldier' image mentioned in yesterday's Note rather than the other, although some think this is a metaphor from the athletic field (often used elsewhere by Paul). The message however is plain, whatever the metaphor be. He had fought and battled in faithfulness throughout his Christian life, against principalities and powers, troublings, tears, heartbreaks and crosses. His course had been a course of suffering, set by the Lord for him on the Damascus Road (cf Acts 9:16; 20:22-24). To this course he had been unerringly true, and in so doing he had kept the faith. We may well be meant to see that faithfulness to the faith (either in the sense of being faithful to Christ or in the sense of guarding the deposit committed to us, or both) involves a continual willingness for all the suffering, shame and reproach that faithfulness brings, willingness to engage in the battle as distinct from merely theorising about it or viewing it from a distance. To be faithful to Christ is inevitably to share in His sufferings, and only thus can we be said to 'keep' the faith. To seek for an easier path that costs less in battling and affliction is to fail not only in faithfulness but also in faith.

51) 4:8

Henceforth - a crown! Here is the glorious reward for such a faithfulness (we should note in passing that it is to faithfulness, not success - the two are not the same - that crowns are promised). If from a human standpoint a crown might seem inadequate compensation for all Paul had been called upon to endure, we should reflect that it will be seen to be the greatest and most wonderful thing in the whole universe, not least because it will be bestowed by our glorious Lord Himself. Indeed, it cannot be conceived of apart from His giving of Himself to us. If Paul could speak of his converts as his joy and crown (Philippians 4:1), how much more would he regard being in the immediate presence and love of his Lord as the supreme crown of all things? The 'joy of the Lord' into which he was about to enter is not to be conceived as something apart from the Lord; He Himself is the everlasting joy of His people. But there is something else: the crown of righteousness is the seal and consummation of the righteous character wrought out at such cost by grace in the apostle's earthly life. There is a very real sense in which we are all making our future now. As Bonar finely puts it,

'The life above, when this is past,
Is the ripe fruit of life below'.

Faithfulness to Christ and His service in this life creates capacity for glory hereafter. This is really the point of the parables of the talents and the pounds as taught by Jesus. It is as if Jesus had said, 'In your being faithful over a few things I have been making you capable of being ruler over many things'. This is why dying, for Paul, could be regarded as 'gain' (Philippians 1:21), as also for all who, through similar faithfulness in the conflicts and hazards of Christian life and service, may be said to love His appearing.

52) 4:9-12

Final greetings, comments, and exhortations, are now all that remain for the mighty Apostle to give. Timothy is to hasten to Rome to see him - and if his execution was imminent, as is likely, we must sense a great urgency in this appeal. Paul was human, and wanted to greet his beloved son in the faith before being called home. But he needed comfort also, for Demas had forsaken him, sending by his defection a final barb into his much lacerated heart before it was healed forever. There is a contrast probably intended between 'those who love His appearing' (v 8) and Demas who 'loved this present world'. He had the wrong world in view. Some manuscripts read Gaul (France) instead of Galatia in v 10, and if this is correct, it means that Crescens and Titus had gone to new territories that had not as yet been reached by the gospel, while Demas had retired to the warmth and security of a well-established work where he could bear his testimony in more congenial surroundings. Rome was getting too uncomfortable for him, and he shrank from what faithfulness might mean for him there. But we make bold to say that he would be no use to God in Thessalonica while thus out of joint. In contrast to Demas, Mark (who also once forsook Paul, in Acts 13:13; 15:37-40) is now spoken of as profitable to Paul. This is a word of hope and encouragement not only to those who have failed but also to those who have suffered hurt and desolation from their failure, that restoration is possible, and that grace, not sin, has the last word.

53) 4:13

There are two thoughts here. First of all, the cloak. The simplest explanation of this request is surely that with approaching winter (cf v 21) he was beginning to feel cold in his dank and musty prison house. Nor should we hesitate to accept this on the ground that it would be too trivial a matter for an apostle with such exalted thoughts as he has just expressed in vv 6-8 to be preoccupied with. Paul was too practical a man to have any truck with the idea of unnecessary discomfort or suffering, nor would he have seen any point in suffering the hardship of cold (to some, a very real hardship indeed) if it could be simply avoided. Doubtless he was willing to suffer far greater hardships than this for Christ's sake, but it is certainly a false economy, spiritually speaking, to suffer want and lack simply for suffering's sake. Then, the books and the parchments. These both refer to writings of some sort, but the former would be rolls of ordinary papyrus, while the latter were probably more costly skins (the Greek is 'membranes') used for writing in ancient times. It is not clear what they contained; some think the latter were copies of the Old Testament scriptures (but would Paul have been without his Bible at that point?) and the former other spiritual books; others think they were copies of his epistles, notes or diaries of his journeys. At all events, he considered them necessary even thus late in his earthly life, and wanted to read and study until the end. It is an interesting and instructive set of priorities. What would we hanker after in similar circumstances, a means of escape, or a means of communion?

54) 4:14-15

The Alexander here mentioned is very probably the same as that in 1 Timothy 1:20. Here is a man who, in withstanding the apostle's teaching, had become a dangerous influence in the life of the Church. When a work of God is done in a place, Satan usually sees to it that there is someone to act as an irritant and hindrance. Well, the Lord will reward such a one according to his works. The AV here is not supported by the best readings, which give a plain future tense, rather than the suggestion that Paul is uttering an imprecation against him. He is simply uttering a prophecy of the future, based on his own personal knowledge of the working of the righteous principles of God. Those who touch the Lord's work of His servants inevitably become the objects of His displeasure and censure. Some learn this the hard way, in the judgments that come upon their lives and their homes, and some learn only too late that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

55) 4:16-18

Lock (in ICC) interestingly and helpfully points out that in vv 10 ff there is much similarity in language and thought with that of Psalm 22, from which our Lord quoted while on the cross. Compare Psalm 22:1 with v 10 and v 16 here; Psalm 22:5, 9, 21 with vv 17, 18; Psalm 22:11 with v 16; Psalm 22:21 with v 17b; Psalm 22:27 with v 17b; Psalm 22:28 with v 18. Whether this was conscious with Paul or not cannot be decided, but it does serve to emphasise that he was sharing the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. The 'first answer' may refer either to the trial at his first imprisonment following Acts 28, or possibly to a preliminary diet of the trial that was finally to lead to his execution. In view of what he goes on to say about making known the gospel, it is more likely that the first of these suggestions is the correct one. A man is immortal, as has been said, until his work is done. The confidence expressed in v 18 makes some think that he believed that even yet God would deliver him, but this would contradict what he had already said in vv 6-8. Rather, he is giving voice to his assurance that whatever came his way of suffering, pain or death in its most gruesome form, he would be preserved in and through it all unto God's heavenly kingdom. The true interpretation of this verse is found in Romans 8:35-39. How could death make any difference to the keeping power of God, when even death itself is used of Him to usher the saints triumphantly into everlasting life?

56) 4:19-22

Prisca (or Priscilla) and Aquila were among Paul's closest and dearest friends (cf Acts 18:2, 26; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16:3). They had no certain dwelling place, as we may see from these references, but wherever they dwelt, their home was a home from home to Paul, a 'Bethany' for him and countless other believers. Onesiphorus is the same as that mentioned in 2 Timothy 1:16, 17. The Erastus mentioned in v 20 is most probably the same as the companion of Timothy in Acts 19:22, and may even be identifiable with the Erastus of Romans 16:23, although this latter we cannot be certain of. The reference to Trophimus's illness is interesting and significant as a corrective to the belief held by some that it is always God's will to heal, and that where healing does not take place there has been a lapse or failure of faith. Paul undoubtedly had the gift of healing, and yet he was obliged to leave Trophimus behind, when he could ill be spared from the work. Are we to say that Paul, or Trophimus, or both, failed in faith? How presumptuous this would be. It would be wiser to revise one's preconceived notions about healing, and allow them to be shaped by the Scriptures. Again in v 21 there is the urgent appeal to come to Rome before winter (after that it would be too late), then finally the apostolic benison upon him. One commentator suggests that Paul is bespeaking for him a very close personal association with the Lord. Paul certainly knew such an intimacy himself, and knew it supremely when he wrote this epistle. What greater blessing could he ask for the man who was to follow in his steps?