

James Philip Bible Readings

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James Philip Bible
Readings

THE Letter to TITUS

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1) 1:1 | 33) 2:11-14 |
| 2) 1:1 | 34) 2:11-14 |
| 3) 1:1 | 35) 2:11-14 |
| 4) 1:1-5 | 36) 2:11-14 |
| 5) 1:1-5 | 37) 2:11-14 |
| 6) 1:1-3 | 38) 2:11-14 |
| 7) 1:1-3 | 39) 2:11-14 |
| 8) 1:1-3 | 40) 2:12-14 |
| 9) 1:1-3 | 41) 2:15 |
| 10) 1:1-3 | 42) 3:1-3 |
| 11) 1:1-3 | 43) 3:1-3 |
| 12) 1:1-3 | 44) 3:1-3 |
| 13) 1:1-3 | 45) 3:4-8a |
| 14) 1:4 | 46) 3:4-8a |
| 15) 1:5-6 | 47) 3:4-8a |
| 16) 1:6-8 | 48) 3:4-8a |
| 17) 1:9 | 49) 3:4-8a |
| 18) 1:10-11 | 50) 3:4-8a |
| 19) 1:12-14 | 51) 3:4-8a |
| 20) 1:15 | 52) 3:4-8a |
| 21) 1:16 | 53) 3:8 |
| 22) 2:1-10 | 54) 3:9 |
| 23) 2:1-10 | 55) 3:10-11 |
| 24) 2:1-10 | 56) 3:12-13 |
| 25) 2:1-10 | |
| 26) 2:1-10 | |
| 27) 2:9-10 | |
| 28) 2:1-10 | |
| 29) 2:11-14 | |
| 30) 2:11-14 | |
| 31) 2:11-14 | |
| 32) 2:11-14 | |

THE Letter to TITUS

Our original Notes on the Epistle to Titus were issued in January 1967, and reprinted without alteration in January 1980. Since then we have made a further study of the epistle in our Midweek Service with, we trust, new and fresh insight into its teaching and the Notes that follow represent the fruit of that study.

I) I:I

The three Pastoral Epistles, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, all belong to the latter part of the New Testament and to the closing stages of the Apostle Paul's life. The epistle to Titus was in all probability written between 1 and 2 Timothy. The Apostle was evidently released from the imprisonment mentioned at the end of Acts, and he engaged in further service in the gospel, during which he must have visited Crete (he visited the island briefly on his way to Rome Acts 27:7, 8 - when doubtless ideas for future evangelism began to germinate in his mind) and afterwards left Titus there to complete the work of establishing the Church. As might be expected, therefore, we find in the Epistle great and characteristic emphases on Christian character and on conscientious and consistent behaviour, in the midst of the growth of dangerous heresies both in the realm of doctrine and of practice; indeed, it would not be far from the mark to say that the phrase in 1, 'truth which is after godliness' sums up the whole thrust of the three pastoral epistles, and certainly of this letter to Titus. If we look up the word 'godliness' in a concordance, an impressive fact emerges: the word, along with its adjective 'godly', appears 29 times in Scripture, of which all but four are in the New Testament, and by far the great majority of these in the later books, the Pastorals, 2 Peter and 3 John. This, in effect, was the final message of the biblical writers to the Church, as if to say, 'In view of all our teaching, and all the dangers and evils of this world, godliness of life is the only safeguard, the only bulwark, the only testimony in the gathering darkness of the age'.

2) I:I

There is one difference between 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus: whereas the former two epistles are concerned with the leaders and teachers of God's people, the latter - Titus - puts its emphasis on those who are led and taught. Titus is left by Paul in Crete to 'set in order the things that are wanting' (5) that is, those things in which the believers in Crete were falling short, and showing themselves to be defective. And this was to be done, it will be noted, by men who 'hold fast the faithful word' as they had been taught (9), so that by sound doctrine they might both exhort and convince the gainsayers. The nature of the problems that required this kind of ministry to set them in order is expressed, as we shall see, in later Notes, in 10-16.

Of Titus we know very little in the direct and explicit way we know about Timothy, but from several incidental references in Paul's epistles we are able to get some impression of the man (cf Galatians 2:1, 3; 2 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Corinthians 7:6-15; 2 Corinthians 8:6, 16, 23; 2 Corinthians 12:18; 2 Timothy 4:10). A careful study of these references will show the quality and calibre of this servant of God as one on whom Paul leant heavily and was able to depend in pressing and difficult circumstances, one whom he learned over the years to trust as a valued friend and colleague in the work of the gospel. Such was the man to whom Paul sent this, one of the last letters he wrote before his execution.

3) I:I

The burden, then, of this study of the epistle - and it has become a growing burden and conviction over the years - is to show the relationship between the doctrine of the Christian Faith and the ongoing life and health of the Church and of believers, whether in Crete in those ancient days or in our own land today. And it has become increasingly clear that all the practical exhortations Paul gives to Titus, and through him to the believers in Crete - and also to us - flow from the doctrine that he unfolds and expounds throughout the epistle. It is the doctrine that is the dynamic of true Christian living and true godliness. And this is the major emphasis in our study of it at this particular time, more even than engaging in a verse-by-verse unfolding of all that Paul has to say. In this, of course, Paul is simply doing what the whole New Testament does. It is impressive that there is such an emphasis in the New Testament on what we sometimes call 'the great indicatives' of the Faith, the mighty affirmations, rather than the imperatives, or exhortations. Always, Paul unfolds the mighty acts of God, what God in Christ has done for our salvation. As an example of this we may look at the Epistle to the Romans, the most systematic unfolding of the gospel in the New Testament. It is only at Romans 12 that the appeal to present our bodies as living sacrifices is made, after chapter upon chapter of the indicatives, and that appeal flows from these indicatives. The fact is, the truth of God is dynamic: it does things in, and to, people. And what it does is to produce lives that will magnify the Saviour and 'adorn the doctrine' (2:10), lives that will 'incarnate' the gospel message in gracious, Christ-like lives. And this is an argument far more potent and convincing than the most flawless and irresistible logic.

4) 1:1-5

In relation to what was said at the end of the previous note about magnifying the Saviour, the following is a telling comment from a sermon by Dr James Denney, entitled 'A Chosen Generation', on the text in Romans 1:7, 'Beloved of God, called to be saints':

'Most important of all: to have a calling to be saints is to be assured that the issue of the Life to which we are pledged is not a matter of uncertainty. We can face it not only with humility but with hope. In his history of the early church, Dr Rainy sets this down as the great change which came upon the world with the appearance of Christianity: the life of goodness became an assured career. Before the gospel came, despair had fallen upon the ancient world; society had abandoned the very idea and hope of goodness; 'deep weariness and sated lust made human life a hell'. But suddenly a change came. Men appeared in that lost world with an infinite hope in their hearts - an assured and triumphant hope, to be holy as God is holy; and it spread from heart to heart till in the Christian Church a new people of God became visible upon earth, a society which, 'with all its imperfections' was a communion of saints. What was it that made the change? It was the sense of a divine call that had come to men. And how had it come? It came through the revelation of the love of God. If we are ignorant of this, then any life like that which the saints set before them must appear fantastic and unreal. But if we know what that means, 'beloved of God', it will open to us the meaning of the other, 'called to be saints'. It is because we have this to lean upon that we dare aspire so high. It is only as we lean upon it that our calling to be God's becomes credible, practicable, real.'

5) 1:1-5

The impact of the new humanity upon a lost and broken world! It was this, then, that was to be brought to bear upon the situation in Crete, as unfolded in 10ff, to set it in order. And it seems to us that it is this, more than the situation of disorder spoken of, that constitutes the Epistle's primary message and that should be our concern in expounding it. It will be seen that in each of the three chapters there occurs a basic doctrinal statement - 1:1-3; 2:11-14; 3:4-8 - and that these form the foundation of the Epistle from which everything else flows. The pattern is perhaps particularly seen in chapter 2, where the detailed instructions concerning the demeanour of old and young, men and women, in the fellowship are based upon the doctrinal statement in 11ff. The apostle is, in effect, saying: 'You must be like this for the grace of God that brings salvation teaches us this way of life'. The 'for' is all important (as it is also in chapter 3). How truly and faithfully - and effectively - Paul demonstrates the thrust of his own words in 1:9 - 'holding fast the faithful word...by sound doctrine exhorting and convincing the gainsayers.'

It will be useful at this point to give a brief analysis of the Epistle's contents:

Chapter 1 Command to Titus, with regard to the ministry

Chapter 2 Commands to Titus, with regard to the various classes in relation to their family life.

Chapter 3 Commands to Titus with regard to the behaviour of Christians to the heathen world, to their life as citizens.

6) 1:1-3

We look first, then, at the doctrinal content of 1-3. At the outset we need to determine the meaning of Paul's phrase in 1 – 'according to the faith of God's elect', as the AV puts it. There are various interpretations (see modern versions), and we mention three in particular.

One is to take the word 'according' quite literally, to mean that Paul's apostleship was constituted and determined by the faith of God's chosen people, i.e. that it owed much to the past, to the Old Testament past in which it was grounded, and the more immediate New Testament part, the history up to that time of the Early Church, whose prayers and tears won him into the kingdom of God. All this is true of his apostleship; but it may be thought he would hardly state this at the beginning of an epistle, or in such a way as this.

Another interpretation is to take it as meaning that Paul was marked as an apostle and shown to be one, by the fact of the faith of God's people - that is the fact that believers were now in existence through his ministry was proof that he was an apostle in very truth. This is the construction that the NEB translation places upon his words when it says, 'marked as such by...the faith of God's chosen people, knowledge of the truth...and the hope of eternal life.'

Perhaps the simplest interpretation is to take the phrase 'according to' as equivalent to 'for', in the sense of 'for the furtherance of the faith of God's elect - to bring them into life and maturity in Christ. This is what Paul was for (cf Ephesians 3:1, 'prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles'). Which poses for us the question: 'What are we for? Have we found our purpose in life?' One thinks of our Lord's parable of the lost coin in Luke 15 - bearing the image and superscription of the king, minted for a purpose, and a job for it to do. It was nevertheless out of circulation and fulfilling no useful purpose. This is the picture of many a life, and not a few Christian lives also. Is there any sense of direction in our lives?

7) 1:1-3

'Acknowledging' (1), or 'full knowledge, recognition' may refer either to God's elect, meaning that Paul's apostleship was for the purpose of securing the proper acknowledging or recognition of the truth among men; or 'knowledge of the truth' as something in the Apostle himself, as a twin evidence, with faith itself, of his calling as an apostle, and something to which he had been brought by the forces that had shaped his destiny toward apostleship. Either way, faith and knowledge go together and neither can stand alone. It is particularly true that faith is nourished and strengthened by knowledge of the truth, for faith is not a vague quality or characteristic that exists in itself within us, but something born and nurtured by the truth of God. It is the truth of God that gives us faith and begets it in us. How, then, could we have faith apart from the knowledge of the truth?

We should note two things here: (i) Jesus said 'according to your faith be it unto you', i.e. faith is what conditions experience. But faith itself rests on facts, and if faith does not have the facts to inform and nourish it, it will be weak and fitful, and experience will be correspondingly indifferent. Facts - faith - experience - this is the New Testament pattern (hence Paul's insistence in e.g. Romans 6/7, 'know ye not?' and his prayer in Ephesians 1:18, 'that ye may know...'). (ii) We should not forget that it was from a church deeply taught in the Word and well equipped with knowledge of the truth that the first great missionary outreach took place in the Early Church (Acts 11:25ff and the fellowship at Antioch taught of God through Paul and Barnabas).

8) 1:1-3

The phrase at the end of 1 'after godliness' has the force of 'which accords with godliness' (RSV), and Paul is again referring to 'a belief that behaves'. One thinks of the similar thought in 1 Timothy 3:15, where he speaks of the Church as the pillar and ground of the truth, which means in that context the company of the faithful, through right behaviour and godliness of living being a witness to the truth of God, the testimony to the truth that a real fellowship of the people of God can be such a witness, when its corporate life, the inter-relation between its members, is ordained 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. 'Truth according to godliness' - this is the basic message of the Epistle. Lock in the I.C.C. has a fine comment as he sums up the thrust of the Epistle in its emphasis on the character of those that are taught (in contrast to 1 and 2 Timothy, which deal with the character of those who teach) 'To secure such a character the foundation is laid in sound, wholesome teaching: the grace of God disciplines and educates: Christ's self-sacrifice was made for this very purpose: God's own graciousness and love for man is the model for the Christian's imitation and supplies the strength for it. The Church is the school of character.'

9) 1:1-3

Calvin says, of the phrase 'hope of eternal life' in 2, 'Meditation on the life of heaven is the beginning both of true religion and a desire for godliness'. It is impressive to realise that almost every reference in the New Testament to the life to come is made the basis of exhortation to godliness of life. J.B. Phillips, in his introduction to 'Letters to Young Churches', has a remarkably impressive comment on this theme which is well worth our consideration. 'To the writers of these letters this present life was only an incident. It was lived, with a due sense of responsibility, as a preface to sharing the timeless life of God Himself. To these men this world was only a part, and because of the cumulative result of human sin, a highly infected and infectious part, of God's vast created universe, seen and unseen. They trained themselves therefore, and attempted to train others, not to be 'taken in' by this world, not to give their hearts to it, not to conform to its values, but to remember constantly that they were only temporary residents, and that their rights to citizenship were in the unseen world of Reality. Today when all the emphasis is thrown upon making the most of this life, and even Christianity is only seriously considered in many quarters because of its social implications, this point of view is comparatively rarely held. Yet as we read what they have to say we may perhaps find ourselves saying a little wistfully, 'Perhaps these men were right.'

The next phrase in the verse, 'God that cannot lie' is just as impressive. In the Greek it reads 'the unlying God' - what a title! What He has said, that He will do, and He will do all that He has promised. He is the 'Amen' God (Isaiah 65:16). What a treasure house the Word opens up for us, and what an association of ideas! One readily thinks of Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 1:20, 'All the promises of God in Him are yea and in Him amen'. Heaven and earth shall pass away before any word of His could ever fail of fulfillment.

10) 1:1-3

But we must now look at the mysteries we are introduced to in this particular promise of God in 2, for it was made, Paul says 'before the world began'. Here is the hidden, secret, inscrutable realm of predestination, and the workings of the counsels of eternity. This is where the Christian hope has its roots. What is the meaning - and the extent - of this phrase? It will be noted that the modern versions (e.g. RSV) translate 'ages ago', and this suggests - and the commentators, including Calvin, suggest also - 'long ages past', age-long periods in history, rather than before the world began. Calvin says it refers to the fact that 'eternal life was promised to man many long ages ago' and that it means simply that 'many ages have passed since salvation was first promised' - i.e. in Genesis 3:15. In this he and others distinguished between this verse and that in 2 Timothy 1:9 (which see), which he says does refer to pretemporal conditions. But the phrase is exactly the same in both places, and it is difficult to justify a different meaning in each case, if this is so. But on either interpretation, what wonder there is in the Apostle's words! If we take Calvin's interpretation, looking back to Genesis 3:15, this tells us that the whole Old Testament is the history of the promise, and that all of it, in all the vast variety of its material, bears witness to this one great overruling concern, that in the fullness of the time the seed of the woman should come forth to bruise the head of the serpent. And what a dramatic history that promise had, with the enemy of souls ever on the attack to destroy that seed and frustrate the divine purpose of redemption. And through it all, the steady, inexorable march of God towards the fulfilment of His redemptive purposes (cf Revelation 12:1ff - always the dragon seeking to destroy the Seed in every crisis that came upon the people of God down the ages of the Old Testament).

11) 1:1-3

The other interpretation of the phrase 'before the world began', following the AV, is even more wonderful. Before the world began! This, then, was the divine purpose and plan before ever sin entered into the world. Our calling is rooted in eternity, and was planned before Creation itself - we are chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. Sovereign, electing grace was at work and the divine love is set upon us before the mountains were brought forth or ever He had formed the earth and the world. How wonderful to think that salvation is something outworked in time that was planned in eternity. What an answer this is to the emptiness and futility of life. Well might Erich Sauer in his book 'The Dawn of World Redemption' say, 'Even before all the ages of time, the Highest concerned Himself with your glory and with mine. Before the sea raged and swelled, before the earth was built or its foundations were sunk, yea, before those morning stars exulted and those sons of God shouted for joy, God, the Almighty, even then had thoughts on me. On me, the worm of the earth, who have given Him so much trouble and labour with all my sins; on me, He Who is God, the Ancient of days. Truly these are depths not to be fathomed, and which the heart of every man despairs of being able to describe in words. Here we can only bow and worship, and lay our life at the feet of Him, the All-loving.'

12) 1:1-3

In what Paul goes on to say in 3 we need to see the balance and the contrast between 'the promise given before the world began' and the word manifested in 'due time' through preaching. There is so much here. First of all, as has already been said, salvation is the outworking in time of something planned and ordained in eternity. The idea of fulfilment is prominent. The promise of the 'unlying' God that cannot possibly fail! And by implication, the fact that that promise did break into time is evidence and assurance that God's word of promise will remain unchangeably faithful until time's end. This is how Paul can say, with such confidence, to the Philippians, 'He that hath begun a good work in you shall perform it until the day of Jesus Christ'. The implications of this balance and contrast are very considerable. For one thing, it is through the preaching of the Word that the predestinating grace of God works. Nowhere could the primacy of preaching the Word be more directly stressed. The word of the gospel, the promise of eternal life, is made known through preaching, and communicated through preaching. For another thing, the promise of the 'unlying God' becomes known to us through preaching and therefore, basically through Scripture for preaching is the unfolding of Scripture. All we can know of God comes to us through the preaching of His Word, and all true preaching, in the apostolic sense, is necessarily based on Scripture (cf Acts 17:2). It was one of the cardinal teachings of the Reformers that it is impossible to separate the Word of God from the Scriptures. The God of the Scriptures is a God Who cannot lie; and since He is to be trusted, the Scriptures themselves are also to be trusted. Such is the implication of Paul's words here.

13) 1:1-3

The word 'committed' (3) is an important one in Paul's vocabulary. He regarded his ministry as a sacred trust and stewardship, and clearly, from what he says to Titus throughout this epistle, he regards Titus as having received a similar stewardship. He says as much explicitly, in fact, to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:14, 'That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us' (we see a similar idea expressed in 1 Thessalonians: 'We speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel' (NIV). The same idea is found in 2 Corinthians 4:7, 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels'. The treasure of the gospel is placed, as it were, in the earthen vessel of preaching. This is the human 'channel' through which is to flow something that originates in eternity. And what magnificent daring God shows, that He should commit such treasure to such a frail vessel. As Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 1:21, 'It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.' But more, we ourselves also may be regarded as the earthen vessels which hold the treasure of the gospel. The Puritan, Matthew Henry, suggests that Paul may have in mind in 2 Corinthians 4:7 the story of Gideon and his 300 men - the earthen pitchers that they carried had to be shattered before the light within them could shine out, and this is what won the battle for Israel. And so it is in the work of the gospel: 'The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' is what has shone in our hearts, and is the treasure committed to us, but for that light to shine out to touch men, the earthen vessels need to be broken. Broken preaching, broken preachers and broken witnesses - this is the law of spiritual harvest!

14) 1:4

Such was Paul's gospel and Paul's message - and from what he says in 4, such also was Titus' message, for he was Paul's 'own son after the common faith' (i.e. the faith once delivered to the saints, Jude 3), a man after Paul's own heart. 'Mine own son' can be interpreted in either of two ways. It may mean that Paul had been the direct means of Titus' conversion - which is quite a likely proposition, although we do not have definite evidence of this in the Scriptures. On the other hand, it may mean that, although brought to Christ through another than Paul, Titus had become so much at one with the apostle in his teaching and attitude that he could truly be called 'a man after his own heart'. The NEB renders the phrase 'my true-born son in the faith', which makes either interpretation possible. Once again, as in 1 and 2 Timothy, there is added to the usual apostolic greeting of grace and peace the word 'mercy'. Together, these three words, so rich in theological meaning, say some of the deepest things in the Christian Faith. What worlds of practical, experimental religion they open up for those prepared to ponder them as they occur in the New Testament!

15) 1:5-6

This, then, was what was to be brought to bear by Titus upon 'the things that are wanting' in Crete, the disorders in the Christian fellowship there, and mentioned in 9ff. And in addition to this he was to ordain elders in every city. There is a sense, of course, in which the fulfilment of the latter would necessarily deal with the former, for is not a properly constituted spiritual oversight the answer to disorder in any fellowship, and is it not the function of such elders to establish and maintain order? There may well have been some special circumstances, however, such as there were at Corinth, necessitating the exercise of wisdom and authority of the sort that can best come from outside. And Titus was the man chosen for the difficult and sensitive task. We should relate this to Titus' proven ability and aptitude which we may gather from various references made to him in Paul's other epistles - Galatians 2:1, 3; 2 Corinthians 2:13, 7:6-15, 8:6, 16, 23, 12:13; 2 Timothy 4:10. It is clear from such references that Titus was a servant of God on whom Paul leant heavily, and on whom he was able to depend in pressing and difficult circumstances, one whom he learned over the years to trust as a valued friend and colleague in the work of the gospel. We shall see in 12, 13 that the problems in Crete were peculiarly great and intractable, and a strong and authoritative hand was needed in the establishing of a true oversight to implement the preaching of the Word, and related to the over-all emphasis on the power of that Word to change and transform character. We should note particularly that Paul speaks of elders in 5, then in 7 speaks of these elders as bishops. This is a very clear indication that in apostolic times the two words were synonymous and interchangeable, and referred to the same office. It should be borne in mind that the modern conception of episcopacy, with its hierarchy of bishops, is very far removed from the simple meaning of the word Paul uses here.

16) 1:6-8

The qualifications stressed in these verses for the office of elder or bishop are virtually the same as those mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:2ff (which see). One important consideration comes to mind, and it is this: the qualities requisite for a true spiritual oversight are the very qualities which Paul is so concerned to see produced and manifested in the lives of the believers in Crete. The lives of these men, then, must set the standard, and the work of moral transformation must be wrought and evidenced in them first. We can hardly doubt the supreme importance of this in the life of the Church. That they should be 'ensamples to the flock' (1 Peter 5:3) would necessarily be the most powerful kind of incentive to those in their care to take seriously the word they preached to them. Not only so: it would also convince them of the practical possibility of the good life for themselves. The transforming power of the gospel is best commended by those who 'incarnate' its message in gracious, Christ-like lives. That what men preach should be seen unmistakably to work is an argument far more potent and convincing than the most flawless and irresistible logic. It was certainly the kind of argument most likely to make an impact in wild and lawless Crete. Nor can it be different today. It is the influence of a new humanity - a new kind of men - that is most likely to touch our increasingly pagan society. For, of course, paganism contains within itself the seeds of its own ultimate disintegration into meaninglessness, frustration and despair, and it is in such a predicament that the gospel is seen to be utterly relevant and the only hope.

17) 1:9

The worthy elder will 'hold fast the faithful word', that is, he will be faithful to the truth as he has received it, not merely in terms of intellectual conviction, but particularly as becoming himself an embodiment of the truth he holds (of emphasis in the previous Note, it is this that is likely to enable him to exhort and convince the gainsayers). Truth, not railing or abuse, is the best answer to error, and to answer error adequately one needs to know the truth. Merely to abuse those who hold wrong views will only serve to confirm them, through very resentment and doggedness, in their error, whereas the patient unfolding of the truth may not only illumine their ignorance but also overcome their errors and lead them into the light of the gospel. Not indeed that truth always prevails, as Paul is careful to point out elsewhere (2 Corinthians 2:16), for it sometimes has the effect of driving men further into their error, hardening them sometimes finally against the gospel. This seems to be the force of 'convince' here; Paul does not mean that they will be won over to the truth, but rather that they will be exposed and shown to be wrong. It is, however, sadly true that many who have been exposed by the truth and shown to be wrong nevertheless cling tenaciously to their error. Having seen light, they prefer darkness to it, because the humbling involved in admitting and abandoning it is too great for them to contemplate. The darkness deepens in them, and but for the grace of God they pass into a night on which no morning will dawn.

18) 1:10-11

The next few verses underline the necessity for the aforementioned qualifications in the spiritual leaders in Crete. The reference here is to those Jewish Christians who had proved a thorn in Paul's flesh during most, if not all, of his missionary career, men who had turned to Christ but who had never really escaped the bondage of the legalism that was so much a part of their tradition. The words Paul uses to describe them are particularly significant, especially 'unruly' which has the force of 'insubordinate'. It is almost a military word, and contains the idea of rebelling against lawful authority and discipline. This is generally the hidden root in the lives of troublemakers in the Church, whether in the dissemination of wrong doctrine or in simply being 'difficult'. There is a discipline they have refused to accept, a challenge that has hurt, and a death they have been unwilling to die. It is from this that the vain talking and deceit flow. It is not clear whether the vain talk (the word could be rendered 'unreal' or 'unproductive') is the cause of the deception or not, but one thinks of how easily and effortlessly 'religious jargon' can drip off the tongues of those who have seldom allowed the ploughshare of the Word to drive deep into their hearts, giving the impression of a sanctity they are far from experiencing or possessing. It is a measure of how deadly dangerous this can be that Paul should speak of whole houses being subverted. Doubtless he has in mind in particular the false teaching of these men - but it is the state of the teachers as much as their teaching that must be held responsible, and this is what we must discern, with the reason for it, as stated above.

19) 1:12-14

Some have thought that it is preposterous and unfair of Paul to have made such a sweeping statement about the Cretans in 12f, but it is a generalisation he is making, we must remember, in much the same terms as we sometimes hear it said, 'The Scots are a thrifty folk', or 'The Germans are a military warlike nation', and the fact that there may be many Scots who are thriftless and ill guides of money, or that there may be many peace-loving Germans, does not in the least invalidate the statement of a national characteristic. (The words are a quotation from one Epidenides, a poet and prophet who lived about 600 BC). It is not only impressive to see how national characteristics can persist over very long periods of time, but also - and more important for us - how they also persist long after profession of conversion. A simple example will make a real point here: the Scots, it is said, do not like to 'wear their hearts on their sleeves'. This may be true: it is also true, however, that this is sometimes made an excuse for not displaying the common virtues of thankfulness, compassion or caring. But there is nothing sacrosanct about a national characteristic as such, and if this is what it does to the Scots, then so much the worse for them; it is just another name for sin, and such a national liability must be eschewed in favour of new characteristics that grace can impart. It must, as Paul very properly says, be rebuked (13), and subjected to the discipline of the Word for correction and indeed uprooting. Rebuke is sometimes a necessary form for the teaching of the Word to take in the transformation of character. Here, it is with a view to producing soundness of faith, just as the sharp cut of the surgeon's knife clears the way for health to return to a diseased body.

20) 1:15

This famous saying of the Apostle's, which may originally have been a saying of our Lord (cf Luke 11:41) is open to serious misconstruction and distortion. It can hardly, for example, be made (as it is sometimes, in what can only be called a spirit of basest cynicism) a justification of thoughts or deeds that are in themselves impure and unclean. The statement that 'nothing is good or ill, but thinking makes it so' is both theologically and ethically indefensible. There are basic and fundamental moral categories which are objective in their essence - i.e. there are things that are wrong in themselves - whether men think them wrong or not, and whether those who do them are pure or not. That being said we should recall a similar thought expressed by Paul in Romans 14:14, 20, where he is certainly not referring to fundamental moral issues, but to things in everyday life (in this case meats offered to idols) which in themselves are neither right nor wrong - morally neutral things, so to speak - but which can become wrong in certain circumstances, receiving their colouring of evil solely from those who do them. We can see the force of this particularly on the negative side; an impure mind or heart can often defile the choicest of God's good gifts. But it is just as true on the positive side, and it is this that Paul first stresses. In this connection there may be something here also about the 'immunity' granted to a pure heart in the presence of evil. Remember we are promised that we shall handle serpents and poisonous things without their hurting us (Mark 16:18)! Notice, finally, the relationship between defilement and unbelief. Nothing can underline more forcibly the fact that only a living faith is able to make and keep a man clean in heart and life. The connection between religion and morals is fundamental and inescapable.

21) 1:16

That connection is stated ever more plainly here. To claim to know God when the life shows no sign of the transformation that such knowledge must inevitably bring is to be the victim of the most dangerous kind of illusion. A useful and pertinent commentary on this verse may be found in Romans 2:17ff, where Paul challenges the formalism and deadness of Jewish orthodoxy, and bluntly reminds his readers that true religion is inward and of the heart, producing a change in outward life which, when it is absent, indicates the absence not only of a true knowledge of God - but of God Himself. We might think that since this is so no one should easily be deceived, but this would be to forget how easily men are persuaded and swayed by 'good works and fair speeches' (Romans 16:18). Paul's words here echo our Lord's warning at the end of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:15ff) about false prophets, for it is in this connection that he says that a good tree is known by its fruit. But the whole point of our Lord's metaphor is to indicate that 'it is possible to be 'taken in' by the disguise' of the false prophets (or professors). A true knowledge of God then will always have its fruits, both in life and in service, and it is the lack of this that ultimately exposes all false profession. The final phrase 'unto every good work reprobate' is striking. What Paul means is that such men are utterly useless and worthless so far as getting any real work done. They are to change the metaphor, blind leaders of the blind, and do harm, not good, in the service of the kingdom. Well, there is much here that will bear thinking about, is there not?

22) 2:1-10

In the second chapter of the Epistle we find the same pattern as in the first, with a major doctrinal statement (11-14) providing the basis and the rationale for the exhortations in the first part of the chapter. It is possible, all the same, to see a development in the thought of the epistle. In the first chapter, the doctrinal statement in 1-3 is brought to bear upon the disorders in the fellowship in Crete, and upon 'the things that are wanting' (5). In the second chapter, however, the doctrinal statement in 11 is brought to bear upon relationships within the fellowship in Crete - and the life of all kinds and classes of people within it - older men and women, younger men and women, servants and masters (in this, the epistle shares common ground with epistles like Ephesians and Colossians, where the realm of godliness and sanctification, and the battlefield of the Christian are certainly in home and family and work). Here then, in chapter 2, it is behaviour at home that is being stressed. And it is clear just how important Paul regards this in relation to the impact that their Christian testimony is to have. We should observe how, in 1-10, the effect that right behaviour in the believer is spoken of and delineated - in 5, 'that the word of God be not blasphemed'; in 8 'that he that is of a contrary heart may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you'; in 10, 'that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things'. This is why rectitude of conduct and speech is so important in the Church of God. The world outside is watching carefully all the time. Evangelism is by what we are, in the home, in family relationships, as well as by what we say, and this is the point that Paul is making in these verses.

23) 2:1-10

The importance of the Christian's life is paramount, because of its effect on the heathen world outside. There must be no risk of disparagement by the ungodly, through wrong and unhallowed relationships at home - and there need be none, for grace has come to teach a true attitude to life - to oneself (sober), to others (righteous), to God (godly). This is the force of the tremendous statement in 11-14, and we should bear this in mind as a background to our understanding of 1-10.

The reference to sound doctrine may relate either to Titus himself, or to the Cretan believers, or to both. On the one hand - and this would seem to be the force of the AV rendering - and the NEB - Titus is to speak as one whose soundness of doctrine will stand out in marked contrast to the errors of the gainsayers (9). On the other hand, J.B. Phillips translates it - 'You must tell them the sort of character which should spring from sound teaching' - and this makes the Cretans themselves the goal of the apostolic exhortation. And while the former interpretation might seem to be more likely (AV and NEB), what follows in the next few verses makes it probable that the latter is correct. The important point for us, however, is to learn that good and worthy behaviour can be the fruit only of sound doctrine. Doctrine, for Paul, is always a living thing, permeated by the power of the Spirit, not a form, but a force in life. This is why the contrast that is often forced between theology and practical Christian living is so false and unbiblical. To say 'Let us have less theology and more practical Christianity' is simply to indicate how deeply and completely the real Christian position has been misunderstood. The sorry history of the decline in moral standards at the present time is to be explained precisely because there has in fact been less true theology in the life of the Church and the nation. Sound doctrine is a 'sine qua non' of right living.

24) 2:1-10

Two points may be made about 2, 3. The first is to note the marked emphasis on sobriety and gravity not merely in the lives of the older believers, but also in the young (4-6). This then, is what grace teaches! How different from the qualities we are sometimes tempted to regard as the authentic signs of the Spirit of God, fervour, excitement, rapturous outbursts of praise. Ah, but still waters run deep, as the saying has it. The gurgling and splashing of a woodland stream may only serve to tell how shallow and insubstantial it is. When Paul speaks of the love of Christ constraining him (2 Corinthians 5:14) he does not mean that he is driven on in frenzied activity, but rather that he is held in, gripped and controlled by that love. It is this that is in mind here in these verses. Not that sobriety is the same thing as lugubriousness - this is the second point. Seriousness is not sadness, nor is it incompatible with joy and laughter. Indeed the truest kind of merriment - in contrast to frivolity which is but a hollow counterfeit - is possible only to those who have taken God, and life, and others, and themselves, seriously. To be sober, as we shall see later in 12, means to have a right attitude to oneself, to come to terms with oneself, to be in control of oneself, by grace. And to have achieved this is assuredly not something to be sad about!

25) 2:1-10

In 4, 5 Paul goes on to speak about the duty that older women have of teaching and instructing the younger in responsible behaviour (this is the force of 'discreet' in 5). This is not something that comes naturally to anybody; we owe far more to our background and training than we realise. It may be that Paul is bearing witness to a tendency towards breakdown in standards of living in his concern here; at all events it is certainly true that, where there is not wise and careful discipline, deterioration does take place. There are two points we should note here. One is that inasmuch as it is the duty of the older women to instruct the younger, it must also be the duty of the younger to receive that instruction with all humility and earnestness. The modern attitude of course is to be impatient of the advice of older people, but it is certain that the wisdom of mature years can be of incalculable value in the considerable problems and hazards that face young people today and few of them can afford to dispense with it, however naturally averse they may be to being guided. And it should not be forgotten that in the context of membership of the body of Christ we are all dependent on one another, and that what Paul stresses here has to do with the proper functioning of the body. The other point is that Paul does stress virtues which are nowadays termed old-fashioned. Duty to husband and family ought, according to the Scriptures, to have primary place in a woman's life. It is perhaps significant that in Paul's thinking love and obedience are linked together, as if to suggest that the one is the expression of the other. At all events, it is quite certain that many of the breakdowns in marriage and family life today can be traced directly to the obvious violation of these or other scriptural principles. It should surely be plain that if God has laid down in His Word the basis of a true and honourable relationship in marriage and the home, then neglect or violation of such a fundamental prescription must surely be fraught with hazard and peril. 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it' (Psalm 127:1).

26) 2:1-10

The responsibility of showing the young men an example is laid by Paul upon Titus himself, and the quality of his life is to back up this exhortation to sobriety. The word in the Greek (6) means 'sensible', not indeed in the somewhat derogatory meaning that that word is often given today, but in a positive healthful connotation. To speak, for example, of 'buying a pair of sensible shoes' might be to convey the suspicion of a frown against anything 'fashionable'; but to speak of 'wearing sensible shoes' for walking on the hills would be a different matter. It is in the latter way that Paul is speaking here. The power of personal example is very real, perhaps especially among the young, where lives are ready and waiting, so to speak, to receive impressions; but even here the example will impress only if it is seen to be attractive and worth emulating. And, of course, it is the dedication which Paul's words imply here that provides the drawing power, and the thoroughness of the challenge that living in this way throws out to those confronted with it. Perhaps, if we pandered less to the young in our churches today - spoon-feeding them as we do with all manner of tempting bait to draw them to - not the Church, alas, but merely into church buildings - which is something very different, and instead placed before them the inflexible and total challenge of the gospel, we might succeed in capturing the rising generation for Christ. We lose the young today not because the Church's standard is too high, but because it is too low, so low that to them it seems scarcely worth serious consideration. Where there is no vision, the people perish.

27) 2:9-10

We note once again that here, as elsewhere, Paul has nothing to say against slavery as a moral and social evil, nor does he exhort slaves to take action to throw off the yoke. This is not to say that Paul was indifferent to such social injustices, or that his gospel had no real social conscience. We have elsewhere pointed out (in Notes on Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon) that the indirect influence of Paul's gospel was the decisive factor in the final abolition of slavery; as indeed it has been also in the general amelioration of human conditions down the ages. But he is dealing with something more fundamental than social conditions here, namely the need for consistent testimony in the context of practical daily living. Radical improvement of conditions is for many a dream that may lie in the far future, if fulfilled at all (the majority of people live and die in the environment into which they happen to be born), and Christian living cannot be postponed until these ideal conditions come to pass. To think it can is to fall into the highly questionable and erroneous attitude expressed in the words, 'If only my circumstances were different, I would be a better Christian'. We can hardly suppose that God is unaware of our circumstances, yet it is He Himself Who summons us to faithfulness where we are, not in some 'make-believe' world of ideal conditions. No; it is possible - necessary too - for a slave to live an honourable Christian life as a slave, however untoward and adverse his circumstances. And this is Paul's concern here.

28) 2:1-10

We should note what is said in 5, 8, 10, about the effect of true Christian living in the case of young women, young men, and slaves respectively; one might almost imagine a progression here, from avoiding blaspheming the Word of God, and the confounding of the gainsayers, to adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour. If it is true to say that the hazards and temptations facing slaves are greater than those facing the young men or the young women, the apostle's words in 10 surely indicate that the triumphs are also greater when they are won. To 'adorn the doctrine' - that is, to make the Christian Faith appear worthy and attractive and beautiful - in circumstances which are capable of degrading and vilifying human nature, is surely the highest kind of triumph and victory possible for a man. It is something, as Calvin points out, that God deigns to receive an adornment from slaves!

29) 2:11-14

The wonderful statement contained in these verses, so full of profound teaching, is almost a complete theology in miniature. It is this that forms the basis of the instruction given by Paul to Titus in the first ten verses of the chapter. It is important for us to see this, for it is only on the ground of what God has done for us in Christ that such ethical exhortations become either meaningful or possible. Without this, they would be a counsel of despair. We are surely justified in looking at this in terms of the illustration of spiritual life given us in the history of the Promised Land in Joshua, and Caleb and Joshua's famous and stirring words as they exhorted the people, 'Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it' (Numbers 13:30). For the truth of this statement consists in the fact that God had already given them the land in His promise, as is made clear in Joshua 1:3, 'Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you'. It was only because the land was already theirs in the gift of God that they could make it theirs in experience. Thus it is in the spiritual life also: we are complete in Him, and what remains for us is to appropriate, and make our own, all He has given us in the gospel, and particularly, in this context here, the graces of moral character that will adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, in the lives we live at home and in the fellowship of God's people.

30) 2:11-14

These verses give some idea of the breadth and magnitude of the gospel, and of Paul's conception of it, the vast sweep and scope of the good news of God concerning His Son. We are living in a day when currencies in the spiritual realm have been devalued, and men have tended to lose sight of the grandeur and glory of the gospel as it is unfolded in the apostolic writings. We should be grateful to God for this man of mighty intellect and spiritual stature, for the words he has written in this epistle. Lock, in his ICC commentary, has a fine passage on the graces of moral character to which reference was made in yesterday's Note:

'And such a character is possible, for the grace of God, when it broke upon the world, like light dawning upon darkness, brought with it salvation for every race and class of men, and it came as a school of character training us to renounce impiety and mere worldly impulses and to live a life of self-control, of just treatment of our fellows, of piety to Godward, in this present age, while we still look forward to a better future, to the blessed hope and fresh light yet to break upon us from the glory of Him who is at once the High God in heaven and our Saviour upon earth, Jesus Christ, who gave His life unto the death on our behalf - for this very purpose that He might rescue us from all disobedience to law, and purify for His own service a people of His own choice, enthusiastic for all ideal works'.

What the gospel makes possible, then, and produces, is (i) a people who have renounced ungodliness and worldly lusts; (ii) a people who have learned to live godly, righteous and sober lives; (iii) a people redeemed from all iniquity, and purified unto God as a people for His own possession, zealous of good works. Such is the salvation that the grace of God brings, and such the finished purpose of God in providing it - a people of God, and a people for God. We shall look in detail at these verses, savouring to the full the richness of the Apostle's teaching, in the Notes that follow.

31) 2:11-14

We look first of all at Paul's language in these verses. In the words 'the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men' (11) the phrase 'unto all men' can be taken either with 'appeared', as in the AV, or with 'salvation' as in RSV, NEB - 'with healing for all mankind'. Paul's meaning is surely that no rank or class or type of mankind is outside the saving influence of God's grace; older men and women, younger men and women, servant classes or managerial alike - all classes and conditions of men. But what does Paul imply in the idea of 'grace appearing'? Three things may be said, a) If grace has appeared, then it can be seen. It can be seen in its results in men's lives. And to see it is the most beautiful and wonderful thing in the world! We are told in Acts 11:23 that when Barnabas went down to Antioch and saw the grace of God at work in the lives of men he was glad. Indeed! To see soiled, withered, broken lives by a new, revitalising power, being made over again is an amazing, awe-inspiring, never-to-be-forgotten sight. And that is what the gospel can do for men. As the hymn says, 'none is too vile or loathsome for a Saviour's grace, b) The second thing to be said is that the word 'appeared' is sometimes used in Scripture with the meaning of 'appearing suddenly on the scene', and used particularly in the sense of a divine intervention or interposition, especially in the sense of the coming to the aid of someone, a divine breakthrough. The grace of God has broken through from beyond into this sin-laden, guilt-ridden world. It is the Hand stretched out from beyond to save us. If we think of the life of humanity in terms of a grim, hopeless fortress, with nothing but darkness and despair inside it, the good news of the gospel is that grace has breached the pitiless walls of this dark fortress and broken in with a message of hope and a manifestation of power. As Wesley says:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light!
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

That is the grace of God!

32) 2:11-14

c) The third thing to be said is that the word 'appeared' is also sometimes used in the sense of 'the dawning of light upon darkness' - the dawning of a new day. One thinks of how slowly, imperceptibly, a day does dawn. And so often it is like this when God's grace touches a life - at first we are not sure if what we see is just our imagination or not. But, sooner or later, there is no doubt about it, when the light does break! It was so with the coming of the Son of God into the world:

How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!

So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven.

No ear may hear His coming;

But in this world of sin.

Where meek souls will receive Him, still the dear Christ enters in.

No sudden burst of light, but quietly, imperceptibly, with at first only a few streaks of light in the eastern sky. Now, both these meanings, that of divine intervention and that of the dawning of a new day alike, carry an unmistakable implication - that of inevitability and irresistibility. If it is a divine intervention, nothing will be able to prevent it, and if it is a new day dawning, the darkness will inevitably give way to the light. Such is the nature of the grace of God. But this is still to speak in illustrations, in metaphors. Let us be more specific and concrete. Paul does not mean that grace has appeared in the world as a concept, an idea, and a doctrine. When grace came, it put on a body, hands and feet, and a face. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us - and was called Jesus! That is the meaning of Paul's words.

33) 2:11-14

But, if we are taking this step by step, a question arises here of real importance. We say that the grace of God appeared in the coming of Jesus, and that He was the hand stretched out to men. All right so be it. The gospel record testifies to the truth of this, in lives changed and transformed by His touch; Zacchaeus, the woman of Samaria, Mary Magdalene. But that was then; and Paul was writing thirty years later; and we are nearly twenty centuries later. How can it still apply? The answer to this pertinent question lies in something else Paul says in this passage; it was not merely Christ's coming into the world in His Incarnation, but that He came to die and rise again, to make Him the ever-living, victorious, triumphant Lord and Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever. He gave Himself for our sins that (having risen from the dead and now alive forevermore) He might redeem us from all iniquity, through the power of His indwelling Spirit within us (cf Galatians 4:4ff, God sent His Son into the world, and sends His Spirit into our hearts). It is by His death and resurrection (and the virtues of this applied to us and in us by the Holy Spirit) that Christ accomplishes this. And resurrection is, of course, implied in Paul's words here. How could he purify for Himself a people and redeem them from all iniquity today if, having died for their sins, He had not risen again. The fact is, no New Testament writer could ever speak of the death of Jesus without also necessarily including His Resurrection. Indeed, none of them would have had any occasion to write of His death if His resurrection had not followed it.

34) 2:11-14

We should notice once again Paul's precise words. Grace teaches us (12). Grace is, so to speak, 'in the teaching profession', and the work of the gospel is, essentially considered, a teaching ministry. This fact gives a valuable key to the way and the method by which the work of the gospel is accomplished in men's lives. One readily thinks of the famous words in Ephesians 4:8ff which speak of the ascended Lord giving gifts of ministry to His Church 'for the equipment of the saints for the service they are to render'. The word 'equipment' translates a Greek word which has the force of 'bringing something (or someone) into its proper condition'. It is a word used in a number of graphic and significant contexts, such as, in Matthew 4:21, the disciples mending their nets by the Sea of Galilee (bringing them into their proper condition, making them serviceable for catching fish); or, in Galatians 6:1, the restoring of someone overtaken in a fault. It is also used outside the New Testaments by one Greek writer as a medical term for the setting of a dislocated joint (this is one of the things that a true ministry is for - the setting right of those who are 'out of joint' spiritually). The Apostle Peter uses the same word in the great doxology at the end of his first epistle (5:10) in the phrase in the AV 'make you perfect', interpreting and commenting upon its meaning in what follows, 'establish, strengthen, settle you'. For this is the redeemed man's 'proper condition' in the purpose and intention of God. One is reminded of our Lord's parable of the lost coin which, from being lost, and therefore fulfilling no useful function, was brought back into circulation and restored to the purpose for which it was originally minted. Such is the ministry of grace, through the preaching of the Word.

35) 2:11-14

Such, then, is the school of Christ, and such the Teacher who instructs us, and we need to open up this idea further as we note that there is a form of parallelism in these verses. The words 'denying ungodliness and worldly lusts', and living 'soberly, righteously and godly in this present world' (12) stand parallel to the phrases in 14, 'redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works'; and in between, the words He 'gave Himself for us'. We may draw certain inferences from this. We are entitled to take the reference to Christ's death (and resurrection) on the one hand, and the idea of grace teaching us, on the other hand, and put them together, to say something like this: it is in and through the death and resurrection of Christ, and in connection with it, that the teaching takes place. In other words, this school for character - for this is what Paul is speaking about - has the death and rising again of Christ as its foundation and its curriculum. Or, to put it in another way, using Paul's words in Romans 6:17, this is the form of doctrine (pattern of teaching) to which we are delivered in the school of Christ, and which produces these results in us, the denial of ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living sober, righteous and godly lives, redeemed from all iniquity, and purified unto God as a people for His own possession. It is to this, then, that we are committed, when we commit ourselves to Christ.

36) 2:11-14

We should give some thought, however, to what we are like when we first go to this school, and consider 'the raw material', so to speak, on which the 'pattern of teaching' goes to work. We spoke earlier of the word 'appeared' having the meaning as light dawning on darkness. Well, in the beginning God said 'Let there be light', and there was light. But sin entered the world, and it was like the lights going out all over creation. And this brought vitiation upon mankind. The image of God, in which man was created, was defaced and marred. The words in Genesis 2:17, 'in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die' were fulfilled, and man died - not physically, then, but in a far more terrible way. And death had a threefold effect: inward disorder set in - man became changed, he hid from God, and became mean, shabby and horrible. Furthermore, he was cut off from the life of God, cast out of the garden, and separated from Him. And thirdly, being at odds with God, he became at odds with his brother. Cain slew Abel. That is what we are like when we enter the school of Christ. And it is into this predicament that His death and rising again is thrust, the mighty, incalculable virtue of that divine work and 'movement', to touch the deepest springs of character, to transform, change and heal there!

37) 2:11-14

In that teaching, and the work of transformation that it represents and effects, there are two sides or aspects, negative and positive. This is seen in both the earlier and the later statements: in 12, we have the contrast between 'denying ungodliness....' and 'living soberly, righteously and godly'; while in 14 we have the contrast between 'from all iniquity...' and 'unto Himself a peculiar people...'. It is important for us to see the reason for this: quite simply the negative comes first before the positive because the dying of Jesus comes before His rising again. C.S. Lewis says somewhere, 'Nothing that refuses to die can ever be raised again', and 'Nothing, not even what is lowest and most bestial, will not be raised again if it submits to death'. Hence, first the negatives, and hence in the gospel the summons to repent and turn from sin, to deny ungodliness and on worldly lusts - a phrase which the NIV graphically renders as 'saying 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions'. This cuts across the glib patter we sometimes hear that Christianity is not a negative religion. Well, here is a resounding negative at the beginning of our school lessons. Nor is this the only place where we see such an emphasis, for in 1 Thesalonians 4:3 Paul says, 'This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication', which J.B. Phillips graphically renders, 'God's plan is to make you holy, and that entails first of all a clean break with sexual immorality'. The 'dying', then, comes first before the 'rising again'. One thinks of the rubble and dereliction of a ruined building; cleared away as a necessary preliminary to any new building on the site, involving at times total demolition before new foundations can ever be laid. So it is also in the life of man: there is so much for him to un-learn, and it is in proportion as we learn how to die daily to ungodliness and worldly lusts that we also learn how to live. The one emerges from the other.

I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.

38) 2:11-14

The words 'soberly, righteously and godly' represent a favourite pattern and theme of Paul's, and may be said to indicate, respectively, a right attitude to himself, a right attitude to others, and a right attitude to God. First of all, then, to live 'soberly' means to have a right attitude to oneself, a 'coming to terms with oneself'. It has little to do with what we usually term, and think of as, sobriety, in the sense of gravity or solemnity. There is nothing of the 'sober-sides' idea here. Rather, it speaks of 'a heart at leisure from itself', set free from itself and its own importance, as Paul puts it in Romans 12:3. It speaks of self-control, in the sense that Paul means when he says, 'all things are lawful for me but I will not be brought under the power of any' (1 Corinthians 6:12). It is to be in a position of triumph over self and all its manifold expressions, to be able to be detached from them and refuse to allow them any ascendancy in one's life. This is what it means to live soberly, and it is the work of grace to teach us no less. To live righteously is to have a right attitude to others, to stand in a right relationship to them. We must be squared with other people as well as with ourselves, and this means not merely not doing any harm to them, but adopting an attitude of love to them. It is said of Jesus that 'He went about doing good, healing all that were oppressed with the devil'. This is what it is to live righteously; a right attitude to one's neighbour is an attitude of love. Finally, to live a godly life means to live in a right relationship to God. This is the heart and source of all else; if this is not established, neither sobriety nor righteousness will be possible, since 'horizontal' relationships (with oneself and others) are always dependent on the vertical (with God). This, then, is the nature of salvation that grace brings and seeks to impart to men.

39) 2:11-14

A child of God who is truly taught by grace is one who will instinctively look forward to the glorious consummation of his redemption in the coming of Christ. We are saved in hope, says Paul, in Romans 8:24, and the more grace is allowed to do its work in us, the more conscious we will become of the fact that it is only the earnest of our inheritance that we have in this life, and that the best is yet to be. Not to 'look for that blessed hope' therefore means to have failed to recognise the true nature of our salvation and the fact that we are but temporary residents in this world, and that, as J.B. Phillips puts it, our rights of citizenship are in the unseen world of reality. It is, of course, possible to 'long for home' for the wrong reasons, in a merely escapist way because the pressures of life happen to be proving particularly irksome. This is not, however, the New Testament emphasis. Paul desired to be with Christ, which is far better, not to escape the pressures that surrounded him, but to be finally set free from sin, to be rid of the body of his humiliation (Philippians 3:21) and be clothed upon with the body of Christ's glory. This is certainly the emphasis Paul himself makes in Romans 8, where his own heart's longing mingles with that of all creation as it waits for 'the manifestation of the Son of God'. It is also clear from the testimony of the Scriptures that the conscious looking for that blessed hope constitutes - and is meant to constitute - a supreme incentive to sober, righteous and godly living (see 1 Corinthians 15:57, 58; Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:3). It is anything but an impractical and escapist doctrine, but contains a moral dynamic second to none.

40) 2:12-14

Note the parallelism; 14 (already referred to) in the negative and positive emphasis - 'redeemed from' and 'purified unto', corresponding to 'denying ungodliness' and 'living soberly...' in 12. Here we see the source of this redemptive and purifying power to be the self-giving of the Son of God on the Cross, and we may therefore infer, through the parallelism with 12, that grace exercises its teaching ministry through the Cross. It is well for us to realise that everything in the Christian life centres on the Cross. Here, then, is the plan and purpose of divine grace in human life - to redeem from all inequity, to purify from all sin, to create a people for God's own possession. There is the suggestion of a nuptial metaphor in the words 'unto Himself a peculiar people' (a people for His own possession), reminding us of the words of the hymn,

'From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride...'

In this connection we should compare the Apostle's words in Ephesians 5:25-22, which express the same idea. This is a highly important and significant metaphor, in that it serves to emphasise that salvation is above all a matter of personal relationship with God in Christ. And the supreme danger for the Christian is lest he become more preoccupied with purity and holiness than with Christ. In this sense, Christianity is Christ; but, in many lives, alas, Christianity has tended to become a substitute for Christ.

41) 2:15

Having, unburdened himself of this mighty utterance, Paul ends with a final injunction to Titus to speak these things, exhorting and rebuking with all authority. The possibility of his being despised may have been, as with Timothy earlier, due to his comparative youth (although some estimate he was probably about forty), but it raises a more general question into which the age of the servant of God does not really enter. For ultimately there is only one thing that will curb the tolerant contempt or indifference that people show towards servants of the gospel, and put it out of court, and that is when they speak with authority, and with the divine imprimatur on what they say. And when a man has a real grasp of, and is gripped and mastered by, the depth of doctrine which Paul has just been unfolding in 11-14, it will be impossible for men to despise him, disagree or react as they may, for they will know that he is speaking from God. We have known again and again of a young man with a message going into a conventional Church situation to minister the Word, and it has never been long before that congregation have begun to realise that something new, and different, is taking place. And what they sense is, quite simply, the note of authority in the preaching. They know that God is at work.

42) 3:1-3

The third chapter of the epistle follows the same pattern as the first two, a major doctrinal statement (4-8a) providing the basis and rationale for the exhortations that Paul gives in the rest of the chapter. We again see a development in the thought of the Epistle. In chapter 1, the doctrinal statement in 1-4 is brought to bear upon the disorders in the fellowship in Crete, 'the things that are wanting' (5). In chapter 2, the doctrinal statement in 11-14 is brought to bear upon relationships within the fellowship - the believer at home and at work. Now, in chapter 3, the doctrinal statement in 4-8a is brought to bear upon the believers' lives as citizens, in relation to the powers that be, and to society as a whole. Good citizenship is what is in view.

It is impressive to see how repeatedly Paul in his epistles enjoins believers to give all due respect and obedience to 'the powers that be'. Here his concern is to stress the importance of the Christian's life in relation to the outer world, in terms of good citizenship. The Christian teaching is that secular authority, legally constituted, is ordained of God. Since this is so, Christians ought to trust God's providence in setting them under it, and give it all due deference and loyalty. It is true that the Christian does not belong to this world, but as a temporary resident in it he does have responsibilities therein, and he may not contract out of them, especially as he also enjoys, and takes full advantage of, its amenities, privileges and pleasures, which are considerable.

43) 3:1-3

If, then, lawfully constituted authority is God-ordained and good, it must also be good for us, and it is not therefore open to us to be contentious and difficult, as if to be 'a law unto ourselves'. Nor does the fact that 'this world' is in essence opposed to the kingdom of God mean that it is incapable of doing good. There was much good, for example, in the Roman administration in Paul's own day, and he would not have hesitated to acknowledge it, and support it in every way. This may be the force of the last phrase, 'ready to every good work', and perhaps there is a reference to the fear that believers might have in becoming implicated in compromise with the world by associating with anything the government did. No, says Paul; we are not non-conformists simply for non-conformity's sake; we must co-operate with all that is good provided it is good. The thoughts expressed in 2 may well be taken as a corrective against any possible misunderstanding or exaggeration of what is said in 1. The believer is to assume his responsibilities in the affairs of this world, but he is to do so in a certain way. The Christian belligerent, if we are to follow Paul here, is really a contradiction in terms, and it is worth remembering this in view of some militant expressions of Christian social concern which assert themselves from time to time. Gentleness and meekness are to be the characteristics of our testimony, and this seems to be with the purpose of showing forth the forbearance of Christ, as is indicated in 5. 'Remember what you once were yourselves', Paul says, 'and know that what you could now say of unbelievers was once true of you and, but for the grace of God, would still be true'. This is a very telling argument; we will not be impatient with those who in spite of all our concern and prayers remain unresponsive to the gospel, when we remember how long and patiently God once waited for us.

44) 3:1-3

It is these considerations, mentioned in the previous Note - the showing of gentleness, meekness and patience - that lead into the next great doctrinal utterance (4ff). The thought seems to be that Titus may have been despairing of the 'brutishness of Cretan character (cf 1:10ff), but the apostle encourages him out of such an attitude, calling him to remember what he once was himself, and how little likely at one time it seemed that he (Titus or himself) would ever be converted, and where he once stood; thus the statement in 3, with all the starkness of its ugly picture of the unconverted state. The words in Paraphrase 56 give a graphic statement of this:

'How wretched was our former state,
When, slaves to Satan's sway,
With hearts disordered and impure
o'erwhelmed in sin we lay!

Look, then, at this description Paul gives of what we once were, outside of Christ. It is indeed a devastating picture - foolish moaning without spiritual understanding, because blinded by the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4) and therefore unable to receive the things of the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:14); disobedient, denoting rebellion in the human heart, saying 'no' to God; 'deceived', denoting the hypnotism and fascination of sin and the beguilement of Satan; 'serving divers lusts and pleasures', the emphasis here being on 'serving' - it is not we who are in control or who call the tune, we are the slaves of sin; 'living in malice and envy', with hearts corroded and gripped by evil things. What a catalogue. Not, it is true, a picture of all human behaviour but certainly a picture of human nature, and but for the restraints of common grace true of all of us, for if that grace were withdrawn, there is no depth we would not sink to. If we do not realise this we simply have not understood our own hearts (for similar passages, cf Romans 1:18ff; Ephesians 2:1-3, 11, 12; 4:17-19). But - He saved us from all that; and none need despair - cf 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, '...and such were some of you...!'

45) 3:4-8a

The contrast between the dark background in 3 and the brightness of the work of salvation, and of the work and enterprise of the divine love in that salvation is very striking. 'But' with which the statement begins in 4 is, grammatically, nothing more than a connecting particle, but what connection it makes here, for it links the plight of man with the power of God, the degradation and despair of the sinner with the love and compassion of the Saviour, the helplessness of the lost with the Strong Name of the Trinity! The word 'appeared' is the same as in 2:11, and it carries the same twofold meaning here as there; a) a divine intervention, and b) the dawning of a new day. A divine intervention indeed, a new day indeed! The words Paul uses to describe this divine intervention - kindness and love - are equally striking. 'Kindness' translates a Greek word 'chrestotes', which Trench in his 'New Testament Synonyms' describes as 'a beautiful word, as it is the expression of a beautiful grace, speaking of the 'benignity' of God (not a mere grace of word and countenance as Calvin suggests) but one pervading and penetrating the whole nature, mellowing there all which would have been harsh and austere. Thus wine is 'chrestos', which has been mellowed with age; Christ's yoke is 'chrestos', as having nothing harsh or galling about it.' 'Love' here is not the usual word 'agape', but 'philanthropia', love to man, love to individuals in distress, pity for those in trouble. One special application of the word in the New Testament is to the ransoming of captives, and this is well expressed in the words in Acts 7:34, 'I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them'. There may, however, be more to be said about these two great words and we shall turn to this in the next Note.

46) 3:4-8a

The words 'love' and 'kindness' surely suggest a great Old Testament word 'loving-kindness' (translating the Hebrew 'hesedh') referring to covenant faithfulness in God, and translated 'unfailing love' in the NIV, and 'steadfast love' in RSV. It is the word used in the wonderful promise in Isaiah 54:10, 'the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee'. All this appearing in Christ, this is delight of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). It is the same kind of idea that we find in Jeremiah 29:11, 'I know the thoughts that I think toward thee, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil', and it is the free, unmerited covenantal grace that is underlined throughout, as the words in 5 indicate 'not by works of righteousness which you have done...'. Perhaps the first reference in 5 is to the fact that as we are saved by grace alone, without the works of the law, so we must not be impatient with others who are meantime living in darkness, for they may be saved by that grace also. There is no question of deserving this salvation, either on their part or on ours. We are saved, not because of anything in us, but of something in Him. As the already quoted Paraphrase 56 puts it:

'Vain and presumptuous is the trust
which in our works we place,
Salvation from a higher source
flows to the human race.
'Tis from the mercy of our God
that all our hopes begin;
His mercy sav'd our souls from death,
and wash'd our souls from sin.'

47) 3:4-8a

Scholars and commentators think that these verses may be part of an early confessional hymn (hence, perhaps, the phrase in 8, 'this is a faithful saying') perhaps even a baptismal hymn. Certainly one sees the force of this suggestion in relation to the confession of faith that a catechumen would make on his admission into the fellowship of believers. At all events, we should note well the deep theological content of these words, and how much is said in them and how much doctrinal ground covered - salvation by the free mercy of God; regeneration; renewal by the Holy Ghost; justification; heirs of eternal life. It will be noticed from the language and construction of 5-7, and the fact that it says 'being justified by grace', that the justification takes place at the outset of the operation. This is entirely in line with Paul's teaching in Romans 3:21ff, where 'manifested' translates a word similar in root to 'appeared' in 4. Justification, as the Shorter Catechism says, is 'an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardoned all our sins, and accepted us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us, and received by faith alone'. Justification answers to man's guilt; and since guilt is objective, describing how things are between us as sinners and God, and not subjective (i.e. describing our feelings of guilt), justification needs to be objective also - not something we feel, but something God does and pronounces upon us, accepting us as righteous, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone.

48) 3:4-8a

To continue the thought of the previous reading, we could put it like this: the New Testament gives us two pictures, that of man the sinner, in his sin unacceptable to God, and Christ the 'proper' Man, wholly acceptable to God. The heart and essence of the gospel lies in the great exchange that takes place, by which Christ's 'acceptableness' to God is imputed, made over, to us, and our sin, our 'unacceptableness' to God is imputed and made over to Him. Here is how Martin Luther the great Reformer describes it: 'I greatly longed to understand Paul's epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression 'the righteousness of God', because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous... Night and day I pondered until...I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, He justifies us by faith. Thereupon, I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before 'the righteousness of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven'.

And it becomes a gateway to heaven wherever and to whomsoever it is proclaimed. It is a simple fact that at the time of the Reformation, that massive spiritual upheaval in the sixteenth century which 'made' modern Christendom, the preaching of this doctrine of free justification in the blood of Christ, became a liberating message that set men free all over Europe and set them singing and rejoicing in the salvation of God.

49) 3:4-8a

Older divines used to speak of what they called the 'three 'Rs' of salvation - Ruin by the Fall (this is underlined in 3); Redemption by the Blood (this is unfolded in 7); and Regeneration by the Spirit (this, in 5). Now, 'redemption by the blood', by which we are justified, is essentially linked with the doctrine of our union with Christ in His death and resurrection, which implies and necessarily means, regeneration. We could put it in this way: In answer to the question 'What does it mean to be a believer?' Paul would say, 'It means two things; it means to be justified freely by God's grace, through Christ, and it means to be united to Him in His death and resurrection by which we experience newness of life, i.e. regeneration'. Calvin, commenting on Romans 6:2, says, 'To imagine that Christ bestows free justification without imparting newness of life shamefully renders Christ asunder'. And then, he adds, 'Believers are never reconciled to God without the gift of regeneration'. This is an important consideration, in view of the considerable misunderstanding and confusion in much contemporary thinking which has sometimes driven a decisive wedge between the alleged initial blessing in salvation and some subsequent, additional work of grace. Calvin's words, quoted above, are wise, and should be taken as definitive in this matter.

50) 3:4-8a

The phrase in 5 'the washing of regeneration' must surely be understood as having a reference to baptism. Calvin says, in this regard, 'I have no objection to the explanation of the whole passage in terms of baptism: not that salvation is obtained in the external symbol of water, but because baptism seals to us the salvation obtained by Christ. Paul is dealing with the manifestation of God's grace which, we have said, consists in faith. Since therefore baptism is part of this revelation, insofar as it is designed to confirm faith, Paul is right to mention it here. Besides, since baptism is our entrance into the Church and the symbol of our engrafting into Christ, it is appropriate for Paul to introduce it here, when he wishes to show how God's grace has appeared to us. The train of thought of the passage is this: God saves us by His mercy and He has given us a symbol and pledge of this salvation in baptism, by admitting us into His Church and engrafting us into the Body of His Son.' This is surely a very balanced interpretation of the Apostle's words, and it saves us from any false assumption that water-baptism can have any intrinsic power to save and to regenerate the soul, but simply bears testimony to the fact that it is the powerful symbol of a washing that takes place by the word and Spirit of God. 'Now ye are clean', said Jesus, 'through the Word which I have spoken unto you' (John 15:3). Nothing can ever be allowed to lessen the force of these words (cf also John 3:5; Ephesians 5:26; 1 Peter 1:23): We may legitimately render it therefore: '...by the washing (baptism) which signifies and symbolises both regeneration and renewing by the Holy Ghost'.

51) 3:4-8a

In 6 the words 'shed abundantly', the aorist tense seems to refer back initially to the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:33), but also, surely, in the use of the word 'us', to Paul's and Titus' own experience. This is analogous to Paul's words in Ephesians 1:13 which, properly translated, should read 'On believing, ye received the Holy Spirit, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.' We may readily think also of Romans 5:5, where Paul speaks of the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost Who is given us - a wonderful association of ideas indeed with what is said here, where it is the love of God appearing to save us; and in both references alike the Holy Spirit makes it a glorious reality and experience. He, the Spirit, is the great Executor of the Godhead, applying the once-for-all redemption accomplished in Christ to our hearts, enabling us to say, with Wesley,

'And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love!'

The operation of the Holy Spirit of God is central and fundamental in the experience of the believer. There can be no experience of grace for any of us without Him.

52) 3:4-8a

The reference in 7 to our being 'heirs' again parallels Paul's words in Romans 5:5. There is in fact a threefold salvation envisaged in these verses - salvation from the past (justification), salvation in the present (renewal), and salvation in the future; or, as Paul puts it in Romans 5:1, 2, peace with God, access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. Here in these verses there is a wonderful blending of present and future. Paul sometimes, as in Romans 8:14-17, uses both 'children' and 'sons', in describing our relationship with God. Often these words are interchangeable, but where a distinction is in view, we may say that 'children' refers to relationship, by virtue of our new birth in Christ, whereas 'sons' implies our status, and the legal privileges belonging to that status. The present and the future are both combined in that we both have the spirit of adoption (Romans 8:15), and we wait for the adoption (Romans 8:23). An heir is, by definition, one who has not as yet inherited. Prince Charles is heir to the throne; he has not yet acceded. That, for him, lies in the future. But - and this is the point spiritually also for us - he is, even now, a royal Prince, and the benefits of being an heir are very real and apparent. He lives as royalty and has free access to the palace. So also the believer is a fellow heir with Christ now, and partaker of the first-fruits of His victory, which will be consummated at the end. Salvation is both now and to come; a Christian is one who has hope and is saved in hope, and for him the best is yet to be.

53) 3:8

These mighty doctrines of grace cannot be too often or too much emphasised and reiterated, especially today when they are so little understood or grasped. It will be a happy day for the Church - and the nation - when such a passage becomes the theme and burden of its message. The phrase 'maintain good works' may have one of two meanings. Lock speaks of its technical meaning as applied to a tradesman standing before his shop selling his goods, and suggests that in this sense what is meant would be 'to profess honest occupations' or 'to engage in respectable trades', reminding us that certain trades were banned for Christians in the early Church, such as the making of idols, acting, dancing on the stage, fighting as a gladiator, dealing in witchcraft. This meaning accords well with the general emphasis Paul has been making throughout the chapter on bearing a good and faithful witness in the community. The simpler reading, however, is probably the more likely one here, and we should perhaps take it as it stands in the AV as emphasising the necessity for faith to 'prove itself sincere (to use the words of Paraphrase 56) by active virtue crowned'. This is not the only proof of the validity of faith, it is also the only evidence that the world outside is interested in. What will convince men is not a bare doctrine, but the fact that it works (cf 2:10). No one who reads Paul's epistles can fail to realise how seriously he regards the ethical implications of the gospel.

54) 3:9

What Paul says here seems to stand over against the emphasis on good works in 8, and one is prompted to wonder whether he is hinting that foolish questions, genealogies, contentions and strivings about the law can become effective substitutes for the real business of Christian living. At all events, nothing is surer than that a speculative interest in the Scriptures or in the doctrines of the faith is disintegrative and ultimately destructive of spiritual health. This was the fault of the scribes and Pharisees of our Lord's day, but it has often been made to do duty for real Christian testimony in our own, with disastrous consequences both for those who indulge in it and for those who have had to suffer from them. We can think of nothing so likely to evoke contempt from seriously thinking people as the near-blasphemous irreverence of those who misuse holy things in this way. The objection to genealogies (cf 1 Timothy 1:4) seems to be that they were legendary, and not truly historical, accretions surrounding stories and characters in the Old Testament, and therefore very apt to mislead. If this be so, then this is an interesting emphasis on the importance of historical authenticity. The true faith is grounded in history, and the God of salvation is also the God of history, who deals with men in history, not legend. The facts of our faith are historically verifiable, not enshrouded in the indeterminate clouds of legendary lore. The promise of redemption was first given to a real man, Abraham, and that promise was fulfilled in a historical context. Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate!

55) 3:10-11

The meaning of the word 'heretic' is primarily 'one who causes divisions', and the root idea is of 'choosing on one's own' to depart from the truth and propagate different teaching. Thus heresy comes to mean false teaching. But the important thing to realise is that heresy begins with a moral problem, self-will, self-assertion, self-display, and it is this that leads to the division. We should note particularly that Paul speaks of admonition for such people. We must not argue with them. It is warning they need, for they are in the grip of something very terrible. It is well for us to recognise the true nature of false teaching and of divisions, and to have the courage to call a very ugly thing by its proper name. The reference to first and second admonition takes us back to our Lord's words in Matthew 18:15-17. The word 'reject' means 'shun' or 'avoid'. Since our Lord Himself advocates such treatment, we can scarcely consider this to be harsh or unjust; it is simply realistic, in that it recognises that nothing can be done with such a person while in such a spirit. His self-condemnation does not mean that he consciously confesses his evil and sin, but rather that his attitude of self-will and perversion shows him to all who have any discernment to be utterly in the wrong, and therefore meriting the divine censure to which by his intractable impenitence he exposes himself.

56) 3:12-13

With a few final comments and instructions Paul concludes his letter to Titus. Artemas, or Tychicus, is to relieve the latter in Crete, so as to allow him to go to Paul. There is almost a military incisiveness about Paul's instructions in 12-14, and, if we had a mind to, we could very easily make out a case for Pauline authority and supremacy in the early Church rather than Petrine. But this would be far from Paul's own mind, and should be from ours; the authority we have evidenced here is that of love, and won by the apostle by his own selfless loving and caring. We have often had occasion to remark on the wealth of love and loyalty he was able to command from those with whom and among whom he laboured in the gospel, and this is but another instance of it. 'Ours' in 14 must refer, as Lock points out, to the whole household of faith, in contrast to their pagan neighbours. Again there is the (almost urgent) exhortation to good works 'for necessary uses' - that is, to act Christianly in face of every real need that might arise or be present in society around them. Without such action, their profession of faith in the compassionate Christ would be unfruitful. We should note, finally, that this is something Christians have to learn, and be trained to do. It is not haphazard benevolence that Paul has in mind - most people are capable of at least spasmodic kindness - but true, Christ-like, self-sacrificial charity (in the old meaning of that much-abused word love). This is our calling; to this we are summoned. And grace meets us, as at the beginning and end of the epistle, to enable us to rise to it. God grant that it may be so, more and more, for his Name's sake. Amen.