

Thoughts on 2 Timothy for the Closing Days

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon emphasizes the need for personal courage and adherence to Scripture in navigating the challenges of the last days.

Topics: "Courage in Faith", "Endurance in Trials"

Description

John Nelson Darby reflects on the challenges faced by the church in the last days as outlined in 2 Timothy, emphasizing the presence of false teachings and the need for personal courage amidst spiritual decline. He highlights Paul's encouragement to Timothy to remain steadfast in faith and to rely on God's grace, even as the tide of the Gospel ebbs and the church faces increasing opposition. Darby stresses the importance of Scripture as a guide during these perilous times and the necessity for believers to endure hardships while maintaining their testimony. He concludes with a call to live earnestly for Christ, recognizing the urgency of the times and the imminent return of the Lord.

Transcript

It is worthy of remark that the moment you get out of the epistles to the churches, you get catholic epistles and others which treat the church as in the "last days." In John, there were "many antichrists." In Peter, "Judgment must begin at the house of God." In 1 Timothy, "In the latter times some shall depart from the faith." In 2 Timothy, "In the last days perilous times shall come." In Jude, "Certain men are crept in unawares." In 2 Peter, "There shall be false teachers among you."

It is at such a time that God specially commends us to His word; and He has taken care that we should have in Scripture what would guide us in the last days, when He commends us to it. After Paul's departure grievous wolves would come in, not sparing the flock. He commends us to God and the word of His grace. (Acts 20. See also 2 Timothy 3:14-17). We need the grace of endurance in such a day. And when one goes through the trial with God beforehand, he meets the enemy and the actual trial when it comes, and the distressing effect upon the heart is gone. God helps and sustains us in it and through it.

One is struck in reading the second epistle to Timothy, by the way in which Paul goes back from dispensational glory (as in Ephesians, etc.) down to natural and Jewish relationships of private and personal character: "I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers, with pure conscience," and, "When I call to mind the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and in thy mother Eunice."

There is nothing he insists on more, than NOT TO LOSE PERSONAL COURAGE IN A TIME OF RUIN, no matter how great the ruin may be: "For God hath not given us the spirit of cowardice; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." It is always thus. "In nothing terrified by your adversaries." "Be not thou, therefore, ashamed of the testimony of our Lord (i.e., the gospel and the testimony generally), nor of me his prisoner." Satan is to be met with confidence as a beaten enemy. This gives steady firmness to the soul. One has the truth, and knows one has it; and this gives quiet consciousness, and keeps one in the midst of the attacks of the enemy in an evil day. He is to be thoroughly courageous when all the evil was coming in, and was there; to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"; to; "endure hardness." It was when the power of evil had come in that he expects courage.

238 This is not the tide of blessing which carries on others; but the ebb had come, and individuals were standing and stemming it, and carrying on the testimony of the truth. It was not like the tide of the gospel at the first when "a great door and effectual opened"; but, rather, "be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God." It is then we require the power of God and personal courage more than ever. All this is "truth for the times" in which we live. (There is truth for eternity as well.) 2 Tim. 1:9, 10: "Not according to our works," i.e., our responsibility. The history of the responsible man ended with the Cross. There atonement was made, and God's eternal purposes came out. The Cross maintained the responsibility of man and the authority of God. Through it, we get out by redemption into the state where it was His purpose and grace to put us before the world began. The Church has nothing to do with this earth except to go through it.

The tide of the Gospel had gathered a crowd of people into this wonderful calling, but the tide began to ebb, and all were going back again (2 Tim. 1:15). Positive power is needed in such a time, as well as having the truth. There are two things that are worthy of notice; first, that we now have only the power of good in the midst of evil, but the evil is never set to rights till the Lord comes; and the instant the power of good is not there, you get away down the stream; and second, how the good that God set up failed so fast. But this has always been so. The counsels of God as to what He set up were made known, and the power of evil came in at once to frustrate the counsels.

Verse 12. "For the which cause," etc. He was a prisoner for having carried the testimony to the Gentiles. But he had entrusted his happiness to Christ, and He would keep it for him against that day.

239 In verses 13 and 14, he passes on the testimony to Timothy, who would commit "the truth" to faithful men, who could teach it to others. The Church had ceased to be a guarantee for "the truth," i.e., the doctrines of Christianity and of Christ.

Defection was the order of the day (see 2 Tim. 1:15); and in view of such, as of the general state of things, Timothy was to be "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." The Apostle now takes up the case of a soldier, an athlete, and a husbandman. He must not be entangled with the affairs of this life, but be entirely at the disposal of Him who had called him to be a soldier. Striving in the games, he must do so lawfully; and labouring first, be a partaker of the fruits of it.

Paul's gospel and Paul's doctrine are positive things for the last days. WE ARE WALKING AND LABOURING IN THE MIDST OF AN IMMENSE NETWORK OF SYSTEMS IN WHICH PAUL'S MINISTRY IS TOTALLY UNKNOWN. For it he suffered as an evildoer unto bonds.

How like to Christ's own words are those of the Apostle in 2 Tim. 2:10!

We now get corruption of doctrine (2 Tim. 2:16, etc.). There had been falling away. Thus (v. 19) individual responsibility (coupled with God's faithful knowledge of His own) to depart from iniquity. In v. 20 we have ecclesiastical apprehension.

Supposing a person says, "I do not see that so and so is wrong when Scripture forbids it," this those walking in the truth cannot allow. You cannot take the conscience of the individual for the rule of the church. Scripture is its guide. Thus we have to walk with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. At the beginning of Christianity we did not find this expression. It was more general, "all that call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." Now it is "all that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart." The Church should have been the witness for the glory of Christ on high, and is now mixed up with all that witnesses against Him here below.

In 2 Tim. 2:24, "patient" should be "bearing evil." "In meekness instructing those that oppose" (see New Trans.), that they might be recovered to God's will from the snares of the devil.

240 The profession of Christianity has become the reproduction, under the name of Christ, of all the horrors and wickedness of heathenism. (Compare 2 Tim. 3:1-4 with Rom. 1:29-31.)

We are never able to judge rightly as to what we have to do and to meet in the last days, unless we are conscious that we have to do with Satan's power actually; the "Jannes and Jambres" referred to were mere instruments of Satan. But their folly will be shown up, perhaps now, perhaps by and by.

The expression "silly women" is applicable to men of effeminate mind as well as to women. It is the turn and bent of the mind of the persons who are thus beguiled.

We here get Paul's doctrine (v. 10) and the manner of life which flowed from it. "Thou hast fully known" - i.e., had perfect understanding of it. It is a like expression to that in Luke 1:3: "Having had perfect understanding," etc. He had fully followed up his teaching, as having learned it thoroughly. The manner of life goes with it.

In v. 12 the emphasis is on "godly"; they will suffer. Things would get worse and worse. It was the old story with the world - either deceiving itself or being deceived.

He now casts us upon Scripture specially. In v. 15, it is the Old Testament Scriptures which Timothy had known. In verse 16 he embraces "all Scripture." Scripture is the point - that which was written. Peter stamps Paul's writings with the authority of the other Scriptures. He says they are Scripture (2 Peter 3:16). The man who can do this was conscious he was writing Scripture himself.

One may say, "How do you know that Scripture is the Word of God?" I reply, "How do you know that the sun shines?" If you say "It does not," you manifest the ground you are on, as denying it. If you say "It does," you admit it. God has spoken so as to make Himself known, and to make people know He is speaking.

In the New Testament the Holy Ghost comes down and vitalizes all the circumstances through which the new man has to pass. He takes up the little things of everyday Christian life. It is a mistake to suppose the Holy Ghost only engages Himself with great ecclesiastical things. As there is nothing too great for God to give us, so there is nothing too little for God to take up and interest Himself in for us. There is nothing so common as eating and drinking and dress. These things are here taken up most strongly. Even these things become an opportunity for the glory of God. God would never have us to act as a man; but always,

by the power of the Holy Ghost, to act as a Christian. Thus the Holy Ghost enters upon the circumstances of daily Christian life, and vitalizes them. When the apostle writes of these things therefore, the words in which he wrote are the words of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 2:13), as much as when the prophet of old uttered his magnificent strains with "Thus saith the Lord," and then sat down to study his own prophecies, to see what they meant and of whom they spake. (See 1 Peter 1, 2)

241 The man of God is prepared unto every good work, in his having departed from iniquity and purged himself from the vessels of dishonour. In 2 Tim. 2 he is equipped; in 2 Tim. 3 furnished unto every good work; in 2 Tim. 4 he goes to war. He is to "reprove, rebuke, exhort." This shows the signs of failure which the wisdom of the Spirit foresaw. It was not so much evangelizing as preaching "the word" amongst professing Christians who would not endure sound doctrine. All was to be done in view of His appearing and His kingdom. Then faithfulness would be manifested.

We should be more earnest than ever in living to Christ, as we are now in the shaking of all things, and the Lord may come at any time now. Worldliness amongst us is a sign and a source of weakness. It must be "with all long-suffering and doctrine." These are the elements that must give character to our service. If men were left to their own responsibility they would never come in.

So he concludes, "I am now being poured forth" (v. 6). In Phil. 2 it had been, "If I be poured forth." Things have gone further here. "My release," is the thought, because he had been in the combat as an athlete. He can say, "I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith." It was the finishing of his race and wrestling of 1 Cor. 9:24-27. The Lord would preserve him to His heavenly kingdom, if he was not to be preserved on earth (v. 18). Earlier, his desire was that he might finish his course with joy (Acts 20) Here he had done it: "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

May we covet the same grace!

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