

The Ministry in the Pastoral Epistles

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the ministry in the Pastoral Epistles, specifically in 2 Timothy, and explores the Apostle Paul's view of the ministry, highlighting the need for strength in the grace of Christ Jesus and the preservation of the deposit of the Gospel.

Topics: "Pastoral Ministry", "Spiritual Leadership"

Description

Dr. W.H. Griffith Thomas emphasizes the importance of the Scriptures in the ministry, urging ministers to be fully awake, spiritually alert, and keen, avoiding drowsiness and self-indulgence. He highlights the necessity of enduring afflictions, sacrificing, and being prepared to suffer for the Gospel. The call to do the work of an evangelist is emphasized, reminding ministers to proclaim the Good News with a message of salvation and hope. Lastly, he stresses the need for ministers to fully discharge their ministry, making full proof of it by being completely furnished for every good work, maintaining spiritual vitality through continual study of the Word, trust in Christ, and perseverance in the ministry.

Transcript

It is in the Pastoral Epistles that naturally we find much about St. Paul's view of the ministry. And of these a special interest attaches to 2 Timothy, because it contains the Apostle's last words. They are personal revelations of himself given as counsels to Timothy. The position of the Apostle gives pathos to the writing. He was in prison, and yet is full of cheer and hope as he bids his timid young friend to look forward to life and work. The weakness (perhaps partly physical) of Timothy was ever in view, and Paul valued him highly because of his earnestness.

Section 1. The Ministerial Gift (2 Tim. 1:6 f.).

I. A Reminder.

1. Of a gift bestowed. "The gift of God which is in thee through the putting on of my hands."

Dr. Hort (Christian Ecclesia, p. 186) distinguishes between this and the counsel in 1 Tim. 4:14: "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery"; and regards this as not referring to Ordination only, but to the whole life (verse 5). In any case, it means the Holy Spirit as a definite Divine gift.

2. Of the need of using the bestowed gift. "Stir up," i.e. "fan to a flame". There was danger of the fire dying down, as there always is this peril in things spiritual. In medicine, the medicinal matter is on top and the water is at the bottom, and it must be shaken in order to give every particle the medicinal quality. So in science, there is a difference between latent and energetic power; the former has to be transmuted into the latter. And so also in regard to human life, it is character that gives quality to action. When the excitation is withdrawn, there is an inevitable tendency to precipitate itself. Hence the reason for "stirring up" the gift, for fanning it into a flame.

II. A Reason.

1. An actual gift had been bestowed, a gift which could be characterized in no uncertain terms, both negatively and positively. Negatively, it was "not a spirit of fear," or "cowardice". There was no fear in the Apostle. He neither cringed to the great nor was intimidated by the many. The ministry is in danger of being afraid. We may hide what we are, or have, or we may withhold what we possess. There may be simulation, or dissimulation, the pretense of what we are not, or the hiding of what we are. This is not the spirit of the Christian ministry. There must be no fear, no cowardice, nothing craven, or shrinking. But what precisely and positively does this spirit mean?

(a) It is a Spirit of Power. The Spirit of God is an energy in the soul, and a capability in speech and action. There is nothing more characteristic of Christianity than δυνάμις, power, and that is part of our gift for life and ministry.

(b) It is a Spirit of Love. This is the method of the Spirit: overcoming opposition, rendering service, and suffering everything in an atmosphere of affection.

(c) It is a Spirit of Discipline. Not as the A.V., "sound mind" (which would be σωφροσύνη), but "discipline" (σωφρονισμός). It is the spirit of self-control, and the spirit which enables a man to control others.

These three elements of the gift show definitely what the Spirit is and does for the minister of Christ.

III. A Remedy.

How is the gift to be "stirred up"?

1. We must recognize its possession. "I believe" in the Holy Ghost, and I must believe that the Holy Ghost is in me. Let us take time to dwell on this; the Holy Spirit is actually dwelling in me.

2. We must remove all hindrances. As fire needs attention by the clearance of ashes, if the combustion is to have free course, so we must take care that no spiritual hindrance in us prevents the free movement of the Holy Spirit in and through us.

"The dearest idol I have known,

Whate'er that idol be,

Help me to tear it from Thy throne,

And worship only Thee."

3. We must replenish the fuel. Fire needs both clearance and a fresh supply of fuel, and the soul requires fresh additions of the "fuel" of the Word if the Spirit is to do His work. There is a close connection between the Word and the Spirit. The Spirit uses and works through the Word, and it is only as the Spirit has the Word on which to work that He can fulfill God's will in us. He is the Spirit of Truth, and if God's truth is in us He will make it mighty and cause it to prevail.

Section 2. The Two Deposits (2 Tim. 1:12-14).

The Apostle speaks here to his friend Timothy of two "deposits". In verse 12 "my deposit," and in verse 14 "the beautiful deposit". In these two phrases we have the ministerial life summed up.

I. Our Deposit with Him (verse 12.)

1. What it is. It must mean our lives. "That which I have committed unto Him." This is the true attitude of the Christian, and especially of the Christian minister. He is to "yield" himself to God (Rom. 6:13). To "present" his body as a sacrifice to God (Rom. 12:1). He "commits" his soul to God (1 Peter 2:23). He "hands himself over" on behalf of Christ (Acts 15:26). This surrender must be definite, unreserved, irrevocable. We must "deposit" ourselves with Him and abide there.

2. What it obtains. He guards, preserves, keeps our "deposit". The need of this is only too obvious: we cannot keep ourselves. Our life is ever at the mercy of sin, temptation, weakness, until and unless it is deposited safely with Him Who is "able to guard" it.

3. How long does this last? "Against that day." The deposit is permanent, never to be recalled by us, never to be returned by Him, and never to be plucked out of His hand (John 10:28). Continuance is the main essential of the ministry. Our deposit is forever.

4. What is involved in all this? It means deep conviction, and implies four steps in the spiritual life and attitude of the soul. Let us look carefully at the text and see how our experience travels. First, we believe: "Whom I have believed." Then, we know: "I know Whom I have believed." Then, we commit: "that which I have committed unto Him." Then, we are persuaded: "and am persuaded that He is able to keep." This means a ministry with an irrefragable conviction, and it is all essential. There can be no ministry, such as God intends, without this conviction. It is the only power against every form of materialism; against every phase of doubt; against every aspect of worldliness. Nothing can make up for the supreme assurance of conviction, and nothing can stand against it. The minister who possesses it has the pledge of everything that is worth having in Christian life and service.

II. His Deposit with us (verse 14).

1. What it is. Undoubtedly this must mean the Gospel. "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called" (1 Tim. 6:20). "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:13). This is the faith "once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3), of which the Apostle speaks of himself as a trustee (1 Tim. 1:11). The Lord has handed over to us His glorious Gospel, His Divine message, and we are the trustees of so weighty a charge.

2. What it needs. Like our deposit with Him, so His with us needs "guarding". There are two acute dangers in ministerial work in relation to the Gospel. There is the danger of losing the truth of the Gospel by adulterating it, by mixing it with other ingredients, and so causing its purity and fullness to be lost. And

there is the danger of losing the reality of the Gospel by weakening it in our life, through low standards, or inconsistencies. Whether by adulteration of truth, or by lowering the standard of life, we are only too apt to "lose" the deposit of the Gospel.

3 How it is preserved. In a threefold way. (a) By pondering it. (b) By living it. (c) By spreading it. Thought, life, testimony. Meditation, obedience, witness. When these three are combined, then, and only then, can we expect to guard the beautiful deposit.

4. The Divine Secret. "By the Holy Ghost." Herein lies the possibility of so pondering, living, and spreading the truth that it shall be forever preserved. The presence of the Holy Ghost in the soul is the secret of all power. He makes the Truth real to the soul, and keeps it vital in life and service. He keeps the life strong, and maintains it at the right standard. Therefore our ministry must be "in the Holy Ghost," for only thus can we be sure of power and blessing.

As we review these two deposits and contemplate the two sides of the ministerial life, we may sum up all by saying: (1) We trust, (2) He entrusts. (1) He keeps what we trust, (2) We keep what He entrusts. In these two lie all things that pertain to life, godliness, and service.

Section 3. The Varied Service (2 Tim. 2).

The whole of this chapter, taken up as it is with special exhortations to Timothy, may be said to refer to the ministry. There are at least seven aspects under so many words or phrases. The keynote is in verse 1: "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Timothy is exhorted to strength in Divine grace, and then is shown what the ministry is to be.

I. The Teacher (verse 2)

It is his work to pass on the deposit (ch. 1:14), and the need of competent teachers is constant and great. Teaching is far too rare a characteristic in the ministry. Men can talk, or preach, or exhort, or appeal, but none of these must be confused with teaching. Teaching is causing another to learn, and nothing short of this will suffice. We must not only endeavour to cultivate the teaching gift ourselves, but we must also ever be on the lookout for such to train them. The deepest, strongest, and most lasting results in the ministry accrue from those who can teach.

II. The Soldier (verse 3).

The Christian man is here described as "a beautiful soldier of Jesus Christ," and he is exhorted to endure hardness, to regard himself as on campaign, and to be prepared to suffer accordingly. How is he to do this? By keeping himself free from all entanglements. "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please Him Who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (verse 4). As no soldier can possibly entertain the idea of any association with civil duties, so no Christian minister can allow himself to become entangled with anything that may hinder his work and warfare. Sometimes a minister interferes in purely party politics. Sometimes he is unduly given to society. Sometimes he becomes a too constant frequenter of clubs. Well, every man must face these and other things for himself, but there can be no doubt of the absolute necessity of a genuine aloofness on the part of a Christian minister. If he is to "please Him Who hath chosen him to be a soldier," he must keep himself free for active and strenuous service.

III. The Wrestler (verse 5).

Here we have the thought of life as an arena in which the Christian athlete is engaged. Christian life involves contest; Christian service requires struggle and effort. And it behooves the Christian man, and especially the Christian minister, to "play the game". He must "strive lawfully". His methods must be straight and true, and nothing must be said or done in our service for God which cannot bear the searching gaze and test of the Great Taskmaster.

IV. A Husbandman (verse 6).

The Christian worker is here described as one who tills the ground, a metaphor which is as intelligible as it is appropriate. Human hearts are the soil in which the seed of the Word is cast, and this means labour on the part of the husbandman. And in this passage we have the additional thought that the man who labours is to be the first partaker of the fruit. This is because he labours, and only on this account.

This simile, together with the two preceding (the soldier and the wrestler) will be seen to have special reference to the prize and how to win it. Whether soldier or athlete or husbandman; we must so live and work that we may rightly win and claim the reward.

V. A Workman (verse 15).

Mark the threefold description of the true workman here. (a) He is to be zealous to be approved unto God. This is the supreme object of all "zeal". (b) He is to "cut aright" the Word of Truth. This may refer to the track of the plough, or the knife of the butcher, but in either case it means "right handling" (R.V.) of the Word of God, bringing out things new and old and giving to each his portion in due season. He is to be a labourer that "feels no shame" (Plummer, Expositor's Bible, p. 370). No shame from God, no shame from his fellows, is to come to him in his work.

VI. A Vessel (verse 21).

Here is another figure, full of vividness and suggestion for the ministry. A vessel! That which will hold something. That which can be used. That which may be an ornament. Mark the fourfold description: (a) unto honour, (b) sanctifieth, (c) meet, (d) prepared. How glorious the privilege of being a vessel of mercy (Rom. 9:23) for service in the Temple of the Lord.

But how is this possible? Only by being cleansed. "If a man therefore purge himself." The vessel must be clean and empty. Empty to be filled, and clean to be used. "Such honour have all His saints."

VII. A Slave (verse 24). Once again the figure becomes personal, and the minister is regarded as a "bondservant of the Lord". He is so in a threefold way. (a) By purchase: "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought." (b) By possession: "He is thy lord." (c) By service: "I love my Master, I will not go out free." As we contemplate these seven aspects of ministry we naturally ask, How can they become possible? The answer is in verse 1: "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." 1.

"In Grace". This is our Position. An Indian missionary remarked some time ago that the great feature of life in India is the strain due to the lack of those opportunities for recovery of physical elasticity and spiritual tone which are so valued in England. The Indian climate, too, taxes to the uttermost man's power of endurance. Not only so, but an alien race, with uncouth habits of life, caste rules which prevent freedom of social intercourse, the consciousness of the English civilian's deterioration when removed from the religious atmosphere of a Christian country - all these will test a man's spiritual life to the utmost.

Then comes the question, What resources will meet such demands? He answers as follows: - "You must find them within yourselves. Nothing suffices to meet the strain, the depression, the moral shock of life in India - nothing but the Christ within you. 'It pleased God to reveal His Son in me.' If that is your equipment, you may take up the life to which you are called in the fullness of hope and confidence. There is no sufficient motive for missionary work but our personal relation to Christ, and it is in this relation, too, that you will find the grace that sustains, that carries you through the inevitable stage of disappointment and disillusion, and keeps fresh within you the devotion and enthusiasm which flows full-tide in your hearts tonight."

This word has an application for us at home as well. There is nothing to compare with the indwelling of Christ to enable us to rise superior to all surrounding difficulties. It is the absence of this that makes us in our religious life so dependent upon circumstances and so powerless when these circumstances are changed. If only we cultivate more the habit of resting upon, and being occupied with, the indwelling Christ, our life would become vigorous, be kept ever fresh, and in the truest sense spiritually independent.

2.

"Be strengthened." This is our Power. The Greek word is noteworthy. It is either Middle or Passive. Not "be strong," but "be strengthened". And the word itself is noteworthy in its New Testament uses. Paul was strengthened (Acts 9:22). Abraham was strengthened in his faith (Rom. 4:20). We are to be strengthened in the Lord (Eph. 6:10). We can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us (Phil. 4:13). Christ strengthens us for service (1 Tim. 1:12). He stands by us and strengthens us (2 Tim. 4:17). With our position in grace and our power in Christ assured, nothing need deter us or check us from rendering true and laudable service in our ministry.

Section 4. Character and Work (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

In every ministerial, indeed, in every Christian life, character and work are inseparably connected and inextricably bound up. A careful consideration of each is therefore necessary, and both are brought before us in this passage.

I. The Work.

The people with whom we have to do are described as "those who oppose themselves." Field (Notes on the Translation of the New Testament, p. 215) renders the Greek, "those who think diversely." In either case the fact of difference, and therefore of opposition, is clearly taught. The people will often oppose their clergyman as well as oppose themselves, even when their best interests are involved. Opposition is pretty certain in every genuine, earnest ministry.

1. The first great need of such people is "repentance to the full knowledge of the truth". Repentance is God's gift, and "in case God should" give them this, the minister is to work, and strive, and pray. Opposition must be changed, and this can only be by means of repentance.

2. The second great need of the people who oppose themselves is "that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." The wording of the original is very suggestive, and even startling. "Recover," i.e. "wake up," "wake from fumes". They have been "drugged," and are in the snare of the devil. St. Paul had a profound sense of the reality of spiritual powers of wickedness. These people thus "hypnotized," or "anaesthetized," had been taken captive by the devil at his will. The A.V. here is far more likely to be correct than the R.V., and the American R.V. renders the

passage like our A.V. The two pronouns refer to the same subject, just as in John 5:39 and 19:35. We are not to expect the purism of the classics here, though Field (p. 246) quotes Xenophon for the identity of αὐτοῦ and ἐκείνου. [See also Homiletic Review, vol. vii., p. 650.]

"Taken alive" by the devil! How sad, terrible, and startling. There are only two passages where the word (ζωγρῶ) is used in the New Testament. Here, where it refers to the capture of man by the devil, and in Luke 5:10, where the Christian fisherman is to "take men alive" for the Master. The "capture" is very real and demands constant attention from the servant of God, if he is to recover men and take them alive for God.

II. The Way.

How is this work to be done? We are told, first, negatively, and, then, positively.

1. Negatively; the servant of the Lord "must not strive," "not fight". Is it not deeply significant that μάχομαι is never once used of the Christian life, even in its warfare against sin? We must not be "combative". We must strive (αθλῶ) but not fight (μάχομαι). There is a constant danger of a combatant's spirit. We sometimes stand up for the truth, but the "old Adam" comes in and colours our testimony, and we do harm rather than good. Controversy is essential, and yet it must be waged in the right spirit. Like St. Paul, we may be called upon to withstand even a St. Peter, and yet we must be careful to "speak the truth in love." No one is ever recovered from the snare of the devil by contentiousness and a pugnacious spirit. "The servant of the Lord must not fight."

2. Positively; the servant of the Lord must be "gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves." Mark well these four elements of true service.

(a) Gentle, i.e. mild (1 Thess. 2:7). Like the gentleness of Christ (2 Cor. 10:1), we must produce the fruit of the Spirit, "gentleness" (Gal. 5:22), for "gentleness allayeth great offence" (Eccl. 10:4, R.V. margin). Gentleness is rare because it is not a natural gift, or an inherited grace. It comes from above, the result of the Divine action when the faculties are possessed by the Divine Spirit. It is to be carefully distinguished from weakness, for it is quite compatible with sturdiness of character. God's works are full of gentleness and yet of strength. Nor is gentleness for a favoured few only. Loudness and violence are not Christian, but are anti-Christian. Warmth can be gentle. Gentleness may often need the discipline of suffering to produce it. There is profound truth in the well-known text, "Thy gentleness hath made me great."

(b) "Apt to teach," i.e. explaining, not contending.

(c) "Patient," i.e. ready to endure malice.

(d) "In meekness instructing," i.e. with gentle humility bringing under true Christian discipline those who oppose themselves.

All this means character for the accomplishment of work, that is, we must be in order to do.

"Though no warning against an unspiritual, no exhortation to a holy life, may be tolerated, let your own pure, earnest, unworldly character and bearing be to the careless soul a perpetual atmosphere of spirituality haunting and hovering round it. The moral influence of such a life cannot be lost."

III. The Secret. Such a work demanding such a character can only be accomplished by Divine grace, and this we must learn to obtain by the due use of means. 1. For perception of the truth which is to be brought before "those who oppose themselves," we must study and become mighty in the Scriptures. In the Pastoral Epistles St. Paul lays great stress on "sound doctrine," i.e. doctrine which ministers to moral and spiritual soundness, or truth ($\nu\gamma\alpha\lambda\omega$). This will mean a regular, steady, personal study of our Bible in fellowship with God in Christ by the Spirit.

It is only in this way that we shall obtain that insight into spiritual truths which will enable us to present those truths in the right way to our people. Nothing can compare with this definite Bible knowledge in mind and soul, if we would do the difficult work of recovering souls from the snare of the devil. 2. For power in using the truth thus obtained, prayer is the supreme secret. It must not be a mere appendix of our spiritual life, but the central and dominant feature.

We ought to have fixed times, and if possible, a fixed place. The essential principle is that habits of regularity tend to make the spiritual life capable of constant, instructive action. Sir Walter Besant used to say that he had so habituated himself to working at his novels at nine o'clock in the morning that, when that hour arrived, his mental powers were like servants standing ready to do their master's bidding. It is the same in the supreme business of conscious relationship with God.

If we have regular appointments with Him, we shall find that, when the hour draws near, our souls will reveal a certain bias and expectancy, and will be watchful for His appearing. And so long as this regularity of time is observed we can vary our methods as much as we like, and perhaps the greater the variety the better. Posture of the body, while important, is of course secondary to the attitude of the soul, and our methods of prayer must be largely settled by our temperament and choice.

The Bishop of Durham (Dr. Moule) once said: - "As regards attitude, I very seldom venture to kneel at prayer in secret. At night it leads almost invariably and very speedily to sleeping on my knees; and even in the morning hour, I know not how, recollectiveness and concentration of heart and mind are usually quickened in my case by a reverent standing attitude as before the visible Master and Lord, or by walking up and down, either indoors or, as I love to do when possible, in the open air.

A garden may prove a very truly hallowed oratory." And these times of prayer must be definitely, largely, and increasingly times of intercession. Our horizon must be ever-widening, our prayers less and less self-centered, and our intercessions more intellectual, more systematic, more constant, more persistent, more believing. And thus by the Scriptures and by Prayer we shall build up that character which will in turn affect our work with vital power and make it instinct with spiritual blessing.

Section 5. The Minister and the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:14-17).

In all Christian work there are three elements absolutely indispensable: the Spirit of God as the power, the Word of God as the message, and the man of God as the instrument. The Spirit of God uses the message by means of the man. In that handbook for Christian workers, the Acts of the Apostles, we have these three elements in order brought before us. The first eleven chapters are full of the Spirit of God. The next nine chapters have less of the Spirit and more of the Word of God. The last eight chapters have very little about the Spirit, and very little about the Word, but a great deal about the man of God. Eleven, nine, eight: that is the order and the proportion. The Spirit first, the Word second, and the man third. The Spirit greatest and foremost, then the Word, and only last of all the man. It will be found, through a concordance, that the references to the Spirit, the Word, and the man are exactly along this line. These three are

indispensable, inseparable from all Christian work that is worthy of the name.

Two of these are very prominent in the present passage, and the other is at least implied in one word contained therein. The subject, therefore, is the Word of God in relation to the man of God for the purpose of the service of God.

I. What the Scriptures are. 1. They are Divinely inspired. We read in verse 16, "Every Scripture inspired of God," or "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God." We are all aware that the phrase, as thus rendered, is one word in the original: "God-breathed". The A.V. is, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable." The R.V. is, "Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable." Some prefer the one and some the other. Yet I do not think there is very much in the difference, because in either case the reference must be to the Old Testament Scriptures.

Either it is a statement that they are inspired and profitable; or else that, being inspired, they are also profitable. One reason that makes me prefer the old version in this case is that there are six or seven texts which in the Greek are exactly like this, with a noun and three adjectives connected by and; and this fact seems to suggest that we ought to translate this passage in the same way, which would be according to the Authorized rather than the Revised. The one point I want to make is that the Scriptures are Divinely inspired, "God-breathed".

Someone says, "How are they inspired?" The only possible answer to that question is that we cannot tell. We know the results, but we do not know the method. The method is really of no consequence whatever, so long as we can be sure of the result. We must distinguish between our theories of the method and the blessed reality of the fact of inspiration; and this is exactly according to what we know of other aspects of experience. Life, for instance, cannot be defined in its essence; it can only be described in its effects.

So with the Scriptures. You cannot define them in their essence, but you can describe them in their effects. There are three reasons why we believe that the Scriptures are Divinely inspired, God-breathed. The first is, the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only before, but after His resurrection, He bore His testimony to the old Testament Scriptures in such a way that they were for Him the absolute and supreme authority. The second reason is the testimony of history. If there is one thing clear it is the testimony of all Christian history to the inspiration of Holy Scripture.

And, of course, the third reason is the testimony of experience. There is that in this book which, as Coleridge says, "finds us," something unique, something inexplicable, fully inexpressible, and yet so real, so true, and so blessed that we can say, and say with all our hearts, This is from God. So that the Bible is the key to the lock of human nature. We can test these things for ourselves. When we put two and two together, we know by the certain principle of mathematics, that four will be the result.

When we blend oxygen and hydrogen in the proper proportion we know the result will be water. When we bring human nature and the Bible together we find that one is the problem and the other is the solution. All Scripture, every Scripture, is God-breathed, Divinely inspired. 2. Then they are Divinely powerful. "The sacred writings which are able." Mark the precise force of the Greek phrase, "which are continuously powerful," implying the continuous process of power. We know what this is when we contrast this Book with other books, these writings with other writings.

They are continuously powerful, they are able, continuously able, to do everything that man needs for time and for eternity. Divinely inspired, Divinely powerful. 3. They are also Divinely profitable. "Every Scripture

inspired of God is also profitable." It is a marvelous thing to realize that this book was written centuries ago and is living and fresh and profitable today. Think of the sermons that are composed and preached from this Book week by week. Take, again, the Commentaries; almost every month we read or hear of some work coming forth from the press.

When we go through it, if the writer is a scholar and a Christian, we are certain to find something in it that we have found in no other. There is nothing more delightful than to study a commentary by a man who is worthy to write it, and to find in it marvelous proof of, and testimony to, the freshness and profitableness of the Word of God. Take Lightfoot, Westcott, Hort, or any other of the great grammatical exegetes, and allow yourself to be led step by step, from point to point, and you find freshness after freshness, until it is true of you, as it was true of Alford, who said that in preparation for his Greek Testament he found something fresh every time he went over the passages for the new editions.

The profitableness of the Scriptures is one of the marvels of the present day. Every man knows this in his own experience. You may come to the most familiar passage, and in the power of the Holy Spirit you may see something you have never seen before. As John Robinson of Leyden says, it is still true that "The Lord hath yet more light and truth To break forth from His Word."

II. What the Scriptures do. 1. The first thing they do is to save; "which are able to make thee wise unto salvation," able to save. They bring into our minds, darkened by sin, the illumination of God's truth and will, and the result of that wisdom is that the Christian man is one who has not five but six senses. There is the sixth sense of spiritual perception that comes as the result of God's Word brought to bear upon the soul. We know the oft-quoted illustration of a lady who looked at one of Turner's masterpieces.

She said to him, "I never saw such colours in nature." "No, madam," he replied; "don't you wish you could?" William Pitt was once taken by Wilberforce to hear Richard Cecil preach, and Wilberforce prayed that Pitt might get a blessing. Wilberforce was soon rejoicing in the message, and prayed that his friend might hear and heed. Pitt placed himself politely to listen, just as he would attend to a speech in the House of Commons. At the end Wilberforce was overflowing with joy and thankfulness for the message, and said to Pitt, "What did you think of it?"

"Well," said Pitt, "I gave the gentleman my very best attention, but I really could not understand what he meant." Why not? These things are spiritually discerned. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God," and we might go on to translate the Greek, "neither can he recognize them." He has not the faculty. It is the Holy Spirit, by the Scriptures, Who makes men wise unto salvation - salvation in the widest, greatest, deepest of all senses. Salvation for the past; the Holy Scriptures assure us of justification.

Salvation for the present; the Scriptures assure us of sanctification. Salvation for the future; the Scriptures assure us of glorification. There is nothing to compare with that spiritual perception which comes from personal reception in experience of the Holy Spirit in the Word. I never tire of quoting a phrase which I believe was uttered by James Hamilton, of Regent Square: "A Christian on his knees sees further than a philosopher on his tiptoes." It is because he has been made wise unto salvation.

That is why St. James is able to say, "Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." 2. Then the Holy Scriptures guide as well as save. Let us look very carefully at this passage. "Profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness." I take these together, and include them in the word "guide". You will find four distinct ideas. The first is positive:

profitable for "teaching". The second and third are negative: for "reproof" and "correction".

The fourth again is positive: "for the instruction which is in righteousness." First of all, the Scriptures inculcate truth; they are profitable for teaching. How true that is every one of us knows as he bows before the Scriptures and says, "Lord, send out Thy light and Thy truth." They are profitable for "rebuke," or "conviction," whatever it may be. How true that is we also well know. When we come to this Book and there is something unconfessed and unforgiven in our soul the Scriptures convict, confute, rebuke us.

If we regard iniquity in our heart, the Lord will not hear us. Oh, the rebuking power of the Bible! Then, for "correction"; that is, putting straight things that are crooked in our lives. That seems to be the meaning of the word: setting right all that is wrong. If there is anything wrong or doubtful in our lives, the Bible will meet us. That is the value of the Scripture for the deepening of the spiritual life. Many a life has to be corrected before it can be deepened. You must have the channel straight before you think of the depth of it.

The fourth thing is positive: "instruction"; but it is really much more than that. It means "discipline," "making like a child," making us real children of God. It is for "discipline which is in righteousness," everything that is included in the combined ideas of the duties of parent and teacher. There is no discipleship worth the name without discipline, and both etymologically and spiritually there is a close connection between these two words. This is what I mean by guidance, everything for our daily life of sanctification in the fullest sense of that term; inculcation of truth, refutation of error, correction of our conduct, and the exercise of our character and conduct.

All this is in the Word of God. 3. The third thing the Scriptures do is to equip. "That the man of God may be completely furnished complete unto every good work." The words "complete," and "furnished" mean jointed, adjusted, fitted; and the reference is either to a piece of machinery fitted for its work or to the human body with every joint and part adjusted ready for action. "That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." "The man of God." This is the last book in the Bible where the phrase "the man of God" occurs, and we are rather surprised to see it applied to Timothy.

He is addressed twice by this title. In the Old Testament it was used for the prophets. Here in the New Testament it is actually given to a somewhat weak, nervous man. This is great encouragement for us, for it shows clearly that the weakest of us can have that highest of all titles, "man of God," one who is manly and godly; and when you have manliness and godliness you are "God's man".

III. What the Scriptures require. 1. The first thing the Scriptures require is knowledge. "The things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a babe thou hast known the sacred writings." There were two generations behind this boy. He had been taught these sacred writings from a babe by his mother and by his grandmother. And he had also seen the Scriptures in their lives. The result was he knew them. This is what you and I need.

First of all, we must know the contents of the Bible. Then, we must seek to know the meaning of these contents. Thirdly, we must get to know their application to our life and to our service. Knowledge, that is what we need above all things - intellectual, devotional, homiletical knowledge; but let us take care we do not put the homiletical first. Intellectual, or, what these books say and mean; devotional, what they mean to me; homiletical, what they mean to my people for next Sunday. 2.

The second thing these books require is trust: "through faith which is in Christ Jesus." That was St. Paul's view of the Old Testament. There are many people who do not seem to take much account of the Old Testament Scriptures today, but St. Paul thought so highly of them that he said they were able to make wise unto salvation through faith in Christ. They need trust. We all know how true that is. A promise comes to us; let us trust it. Let us trust Him Who is the Promiser. In proportion to our faith in the truth of this Book we shall find the power of it in our daily life. 3.

The third thing is continuance. "Abide thou in the things which thou hast learned." At least three times we have the idea of continuance connected with the Word. "If ye abide in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed." We remember that it is said of Satan that he "standeth not in the truth." Conversion is not everything. We are thankful when we are able to count conversions and say that God has blessed the Word. But it is of much more importance to ask what about those people five years, ten years hence, "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned"?

"So Daniel continued." "Continue instant in prayer." "Continue ye in My love." The secret of all growing life lies in knowledge and trust continued day by day to the very end. So I ask you to notice that what I have been saying is, first of all, the secret of personal power in Christian life. The Scriptures known, trusted, obeyed, and continued in; these things are the secret of personal power. Daily meditation, not weekly, otherwise it will become "weakly" in the other sense.

If we live upon what we get elsewhere from men or books, our Christian life will be very poor, for it will only be a secondhand Christianity. But if day by day we come to God's Word for daily and definite meditation, we shall find in that the secret of personal power. Our mind will become saturated with truth, our heart will be inspired by the love of the Scripture, our conscience will become ever-increasingly sensitive, our wills will be more and more subjected and submitted to the will and power of the Scriptures.

This is also the secret of ministerial power in Christian service. Someone asked Hudson Taylor once how it was that he had such freshness in his messages as he delivered them day by day when on deputation work. He said he could only account for it in this way, that he was accustomed to spend time with the Lord in the morning and then pass on in the afternoon and evening what the Lord had told him. Some people wonder what they shall preach about next Sunday, and they fear they will very soon come to an end of their Bible.

If we keep close to the Greek New Testament, or even to the English Bible, the difficulty will be, not what we shall preach about, but what we must leave out. If a man has been in the ministry for thirty or forty years, and follows this plan, at the end even of that long time there will be any number of subjects that he has never been able to take, and never will be able to take, unless there are sermons up in heaven. The secret of ministerial freshness is the power of God's word.

Some time ago I read one of those interesting and suggestive reviews which are found in the British Weekly signed W. R. N. This is what he said about a certain volume of sermons: "... is a man marked for good service if he will clearly recognize that the truth in spiritual things is not learned from conversations with energetic men in the marketplace, but from the solitary and prayerful study of the Word of God." Whether the criticism was true or not, the application is clear.

"Solitary and prayerful study of the Word of God" is our deepest need. Then we shall be indeed mighty in the Scriptures. This is also the secret of congregational power. This is so, positively, both in regard to expository preaching from the pulpit, and to Bible class work. It is also the secret of power, negatively,

because it will set aside and render unnecessary all the more than doubtful methods which obtain in many Churches. Bible classes and expositions, teachers' training classes and prayer meetings will shut out all other instrumentalities.

The secret of congregational power is the prominence that we give to the Word of God. The source of everything fruitful and mighty in the life of God's people is to be found there. So let us determine that we will go to our Churches and congregations with the words of the Apostle on our lips: "We will give ourselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer."

Section 6. Parting Words (2 Tim. 4:5).

Just as the last Epistle of the great Apostle closes, he gives his young friend and disciple four parting words as watchwords of his ministry.

I. Soberness.

"Be sober." The minister must be fully awake and in a condition the very opposite of drowsiness. The contrast with verse 3 is clear. "But." There were those who were turning away from the truth, but Timothy was to be on his guard. The thought is much the same as in chapter 2:26, the necessity of being fully aroused, spiritually alert, keen, watchful. No minister can afford to be drowsy, or other than awake and watching. As Simeon used to stand before the picture of Henry Martyn, the serious face seemed to say to him, "Be earnest."

II. Endurance.

"Endure afflictions." "Suffer evil with me." The call was to sacrifice and suffering as essential to the life and work of the ministry. It is an appeal against all self-indulgence, and for readiness to do strenuous service in the face of trial, persecution, and suffering.

III. Evangelization.

"Do the work of an evangelist." This means that a man must have a message, an evangel, an announcement of "good news". The minister is not a philosopher, though his Gospel has philosophy in it. The minister is not a moralist, though his Gospel has ethic in it. He is a proclaimer of Glad Tidings, or he is nothing, and without this all else will be worthless.

Fifteen years ago two American missionary students, occupying the same room, talked thus to one another: "What message have we got for the heathen to whom we are going? Can we tell them of a Christ mighty in us, Who saves us day by day? If we cannot, it would be cheaper to send Bibles and tracts." There and then they decided that their first work was to know God for themselves, and so from then, right on through the rest of their course, they rose regularly at 5 a.m., and had one unhurried hour with God and His Word, and another unhurried hour with God in prayer. Note the outcome - the fullness of the Spirit for the satisfaction of their own life needs, and the promised "rivers of water". One of these preaches Christ in China, the other is George Sherwood Eddy, one of the foremost workers in the Student Volunteer Movement both in America and in India, and also one of those who spoke most to men's hearts in the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference. Only last year God wrought through him a mighty work among the Indian students of Calcutta, when some three hundred were moved to yield themselves to Christ in public. But there is far more. A few years since he was led of the Spirit to publish a tract made up mainly of extracts from President Finney's writings, and that tract led Mr. Goforth to seek and find the fullness of the

Spirit. He in his turn becomes an instrument of revival in the East. All this because two young men sought God's best with all their hearts. [Rev. J. P. Clark, in *The Life of Faith*.]

IV. Faithfulness. "Make full proof of thy ministry," or "fully discharge thy ministry." Let the ministry "fill" your life, with nothing left undone that ought to be done, and nothing done that does not minister to the service to which we are called. We must draw "all our cares and studies this one way". There must be a power of detachment and concentration if the ministry is to be fully discharged. We must do our own work and that alone. From these four watchwords we readily recognize four things in connection with the ministry: a Supreme Necessity, a Supreme Danger, a Supreme Problem, and a Supreme Secret. 1.

The Supreme Necessity. This is spiritual life, and life in abundance. Without it there is, and can be, no ministry. 2. The Supreme Danger. This is spiritual death. By this I mean soul-death, what someone has called a lost soul in the pulpit. Not sinfulness, but uselessness; not badness, but soullessness. Sermons well prepared but without the electric spark of fellowship with God. 3. The Supreme Problem. This is to keep the soul alive. Not our sermon, or our work, or our organization, but ourselves; to keep our spiritual life keen in the face of professionalism.

And to this end we must guard the fire and keep it burning. One of the foremost dangers of the ministerial life is intellectual indolence, and it is far more common than is generally supposed. Mental activity is not natural, but acquired; not congenital, but achieved. It requires and demands mental toil. A man may be "fussy" and busy and yet be an intellectual "dawdler". He may engage in work of all sorts, and yet not compel his mind to work. Intellectual interest must ever be strong; we must feed the fire of the mind: reading, thinking, storing.

A well-known Methodist leader said not long ago: - "Anything in a preacher that makes for mental stagnation ministers also to moral deterioration and inefficiency for spiritual leadership. A mind grown stale will never quicken interest in another mind. A heart whose fires are faded will not kindle a flame in other hearts. If the pulpit is to have its due place in the lifting of our Church's life, it must have in it men who, by God's blessing, are finding their own life in the truth, to whom it is most truly the central interest, who count themselves delightedly its slaves.

There will then be a ringing note of reality in their ministry." The one thing which, above all others, will keep a man from mental stagnation is a daily firsthand study and meditation of the Word of God - if possible, in the original Greek. There will come into the mind an interest and a freshness which will first of all affect with lifegiving power the minister's own spiritual life, and then express itself in renewed freshness and vigour of testimony in his ministry. And the spiritual enthusiasm must be maintained by a closer walk with God.

As someone has acutely said, ninety-nine may tolerate our sermons, but the hundredth will find us out. Some men may be able to hide intellectual sloth, but the clergyman cannot. Some men may hide spiritual weakness, but the clergyman cannot. 4. The Supreme Secret. This is perpetual freshness of soul, due to the "continual dew" of the Divine blessing, and spiritual freshness can only come through prayer, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit. But when these are real, all else is real, for the life grows strong and influential, and full of grace and glory.

A recent book describes how, when riding in Wales, the author came upon a preacher's cottage, lonely among hills and rain and miry roads. "How does he stand the monotony?" he asked his companion. "The Bible is to him the Word of God," was the answer. "He lives to preach it. There is no monotony when all life

is one great desire."

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