

Faith and Good Doctrine

“If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.”

—I Timothy 4:6

WHEN THE APOSTLE PAUL wrote to young Timothy whom he loved as his own son, he stressed the need for further growth, understanding, and determination in the ways of truth and righteousness. He gave him sound advice concerning faith and the fundamental teachings of God’s Word. “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.”—I Tim. 4:12,13

OUR SAVIOR

The Apostle Peter also spoke of those important truths, and proclaimed the Gospel message of our dear Lord and Savior, the one who had suffered and died for us. He said, “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might

bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.” (I Pet. 3:18) The Apostle John affirms, “Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.” (I John 4:3) Even in the days of the apostles the pure message of truth and salvation for all mankind was being subverted by false teachers. John cautioned the brethren in the early church, saying, “Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.”—II John 7

PRAISE AND CONCERN

The necessity for guarding the purity of the Gospel message was evident and urgent as spoken by Paul in his letter to the brethren at Corinth. “Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.” (I Cor. 11:2) Later, he said to them, “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory [hold fast, *Marginal Translation*] what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.”—chap. 15:1-3

It was to those who were not holding fast to the pure doctrines of truth that Paul was addressing. He was concerned about them and also those who

were teaching error. Later, in his letter to Timothy, the apostle cautioned against these foreign teachings. “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”—I Tim. 4:16

AN APOSTOLIC COMMISSION

Paul urged Timothy to raise the standard high for his brethren, and to resist all efforts of those who would alter the original and pure message of the Gospel. With his whole heart, the apostle pleaded with him to grasp the significance of the danger to the Gospel truth and the great blessing he was given of being chosen as one of its defenders in the early Christian church. “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: Which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee.”—chap. 6:20,21

To emphasize the privilege of his own apostolic commission and his desire to guard the pure Gospel message, Paul reverently gave thanks and praise to God. “According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust. And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.” (chap. 1:11,12) Paul was aware of the intense opposition that Timothy and other commissioned guardians of the doctrines would have to confront throughout the Gospel Age. The apostle then spoke concerning his own ferocious opposition to the Lord’s people and their message of Truth before the time of his own conversion.

Speaking freely, he recalled, "Who [I, Paul] was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief."—I Tim. 1:13

PAUL COMMISSIONS TIMOTHY

As an aging veteran of intense spiritual warfare and with the view toward his own eventual departure, Paul repeatedly encouraged his younger brother Timothy to carry on the defense of the precious Gospel truth. He said, "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck."—vss. 18,19

The apostle also writes concerning Timothy's commission, when he wrote to him a second time, saying, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." (II Tim. 4:1-4) Paul was projecting Timothy's commission far into the future from his day, even to the end of the age. He was thus pointing forward in time and commissioning all of the faithful followers of Christ to defend the precious Truth during that long period of time.

FABLES AND CONFUSION

The faithful are to encourage one another with great patience by holding fast to the fundamental teachings of our faith. During this age they are to 'exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine' to counter the errors of false teachers and their teachings. The apostle warns that those who profess Christ and then fail to be faithful will eventually turn to fables. The result of such action will lead to confusion and a distortion of their faith that he likens to a 'shipwreck' of our faith. It was because of the disintegration of hope that he proclaimed, "Faith is the substance [ground, or confidence, *Marginal Translation*] of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."—Heb. 11:1

Putting his admonitions into a much larger context than for his own day, Paul told Timothy that the corruption of the Gospel, which he said had already begun, would reach its full and systematic maturity by the end of the age. He cautioned that it would be particularly dangerous at that time, and to those who were holding fast to the doctrines of the Gospel. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come." (II Tim.3:1) The apostle foresaw progressively fewer defenders of the doctrines of the Truth as the church would draw nearer to its completion at the end of the Gospel Age. He said that the influence of false teachers would rapidly increase and overthrow the faith of all who do not study and teach the pure doctrines without personal theory or the prejudices of tradition.

THE ARMOR OF GOD

The Apostle Paul assures his brethren that Divine protection is available to those who would stand in

the holy condition of Spirit begettall, and against corruption of the Gospel message. He likens that protection to armor, and identifies its various components which the faithful must put on and keep wearing. "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all [overcome all, *Marginal Translation*], to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Eph. 6:13-17) In addition to these six components, the apostle includes a seventh without which the armor of God will not be complete, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."—vs. 18

THE GIFT OF PRAYER

Prayer is the mark of the spiritually mature, for they alone understand that prayer not only benefits the recipient, but that it also has a sanctifying effect upon all who witness God's wonderful response. Paul offers an example of the power of reciprocal prayer. He wrote, "We would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a

death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us; Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.”—II Cor. 1:8-11

“LIKE PRECIOUS FAITH”

A vital element in the preparation of the faithful is the fellowship of others of “like precious faith” to which the Apostle Peter refers in the opening salutation of his second epistle. “To them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.” (II Pet. 1:1,2) In these alone will the New Creature in Christ find a truly sympathetic heart, an understanding smile, a selfless encouraging touch, or a welcoming embrace. Only those who have received the astonishing gift of the Holy Spirit can fully appreciate the depths of the New Creature’s thankfulness to God for all his benefits. As the psalmist wrote, “What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?”—Ps. 116:12

THE LIKENESS OF HIS RESURRECTION

The faithful footstep followers of our Lord Jesus will alone understand and appreciate what it means to be baptized into Christ’s death, and have the hope of being raised in the likeness of his resurrection. “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we

also should walk in newness of life.” (Rom. 6:3,4) This is the ultimate hope of our High Calling in Christ Jesus. “If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”—vs. 5

PARTAKERS OF HIS SUFFERING

None but those who follow Christ in the way of sacrifice can truly comprehend, and yet rejoice in suffering as spoken by Peter. “Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” (I Pet. 4:13) Through weariness, we might be occasionally inclined to wish for our own last hour of suffering in the narrow way. However, those who diligently strive to be faithful unto death will not be turned aside but will heed the words of the Psalmist David, who wrote, “Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.” (Ps. 27:14) Again, he wrote, “Evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.” (chap. 37:9) Those who will ‘inherit the earth’ are the faithful of the Gospel Age whom Paul, in a different context, called “heirs of salvation.”—Heb. 1:14

The special class of our Lord Jesus’ followers will patiently wait, and be content in the knowledge that it is the Lord who will decide when our trials and testings are over. As the faithful wait, their hearts are strengthened by the fellowship of others of like precious faith. It is a deep and mutual love that the ‘heirs of salvation’ have for one another, and renders the waiting endurable. It fulfills Christ’s only commandment to them when he said,

“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.”—John 15:12

THE DANGER OF DOUBT

In general, mankind is skeptical of God’s promise of eternal salvation for all mankind through the blood of Jesus. Some may have hope, but fewer believe, because they lack faith and trust in our loving Heavenly Father and his plan for the salvation of the whole human family. On the other hand, the entire hope and expectation of members of the church who are now being called is based upon total belief and confidence in God and every word of his promises. The church believes even as its Lord believed, for he said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (Matt. 4:4) These believers must remain wholly apart from the skepticism and ignorance that permeates our present-day world. The Spirit-begotten followers of Christ put their trust in God and his provisions of grace on their behalf. “The just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”—Heb. 10:38,39

During the present Gospel Age, the Spirit-begotten New Creature in Christ Jesus must believe at the end of his course that which he also believed at its beginning. Though surrounded by a sea of skepticism and beset by the world, the flesh, and the Devil, they must continue to have faith in his plan for their everlasting welfare. We read, “Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of

God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” (John 6:28,29) For those in Christ, maintaining confidence in God and his every word is a matter of life or death. To this the Apostle Paul says, “We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.” (Heb. 3:14) James also wrote, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”—James 1:12

THE COMMON STRUGGLE

To assure his brethren that all the Spirit-begotten, including the apostles, share a common experience, the Apostle Paul generously shares the nature of his own struggle, a struggle with which all the Spirit-begotten are familiar, but which the world is incapable of comprehending. “I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:22-24) The consecrated, enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit of God to see what wonders lie beyond death, do not fear. From the moment of consecration and Spirit begetting, all things are designed to assist the New Creature in Christ toward that ultimate goal. Their work is to submit and believe unto the end of their consecrated walk in newness of life. “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”—Rom. 8:28

THE FAITHFUL

During this present Gospel Age, there have been some few of the Lord's consecrated people who have heeded the call of the apostles to defend the doctrines of the Truth and the faith. They have resisted the temptations of the worldly-wise to render the oracles of God more widely appealing to others through alteration. They have understood that alteration would lead to uncertainty, and uncertainty would in turn lead to confusion and doubt. For the New Creature, doubt would lead to spiritual death, which is Satan's desire.

This faithful class of believers hear the urgent tone of Paul's plea to Timothy to defend the doctrines of the faith even as it was in the days of Timothy. Satan's wiles have not diminished nor has his animosity toward the Truth and its defenders lessened since that earlier time. Let each New Creature in Christ consider himself a specially commissioned defender of the faith and Truth as was Paul, and his encouragement to Timothy to do the same. Let each of us also heed the words of the Apostle Peter, when he said, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."—I Pet. 5:8

As we consider the importance of faith and good doctrine, may we heed the words of Jude who wrote, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."—Jude 3 ■