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The Man.. Abraham and Jacob

Alex Dryburgh (Concluded)

Abraham, the Friend of God Gen. 22:1
Three times in the Bible Abraham is called the friend of God. Jehoshaphat, in his prayer, speaks of him as "thy friend," (2 Chron. 20:7). In Isa. 41:8, God says, "Abraham my friend". James speaks of Abraham as the friend of God (James 2:23). He was a man that had faith in God and was marked by faith when he did not know where, why, or how. "By faith Abraham," (Heb. 11:8, 9, 17). He was also marked by fear. "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thine only son Isaac" (Gen. 22:12). He knew fellowship with God. "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" (Gen. 18:17). We note four things about Abraham:

1. He left all for God.
2. He left all to God.
3. He found all in God
4. He gave all to God.

HE LEFT ALL FOR GOD He was prepared to leave his country, kindred and his father's house. The reason was that "the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he dwelt in Mesopotamia," Acts 7:1. This is a chapter that begins with the God of Glory and it finishes with the Glory of God. The God of glory appearing to Abraham gave Abraham the grace to live for him; With Stephen, seeing the glory of God gave Stephen the grace to die for him.

HE LEFT ALL TO GOD He said to Lot, "If thou will take

the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou wilt depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." (Gen. 13:9).

HE FOUND ALL IN GOD I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward, (Gen. 15:1).

HE GAVE ALL TO GOD. He was prepared to offer his only son on the altar. In Gen. 22, God did not want Isaac's life; God wanted Abraham's love. He received the life and also the love. This brings before us the thought that Abraham had a greater love for God than he had for his own son Isaac.

IN ABRAHAM WE SEE THE COSTLINESS OF THE SACRIFICE. "Take now thy son thine only son Isaac whom thou lovest," (Gen. 22:2). An only son, a beloved son.

Infinite love was wounded sore,
It sought to bridge the span.
Shut out the separating wedge
And walk again with man;
He gave his best, his well beloved,
He came, He bled, He died.
To reconcile, He paid the price,
And bridged the great divide.

"He (God) that spared not his own son, but freely delivered him up for us all ... " (Rom. 8:32).

The Man Jacob Gen.35:1
We want to notice commendable features in the life of Jacob. It has been said that Jacob was a man who was loved by God, hated by the Devil, and scandalized by the brethren. Firstly, we notice in Gen.28:22 that Jacob was a practical man; He said he would surely give a tenth unto God. In Gen.25:27, we are told that Jacob was a plain man. The word 'plain' is very interesting. A marginal reading is that Jacob was a quiet man, a harmless man, a perfect man. Strong's concor-

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dance shows us that the word 'perfect' is the word that is used concerning Job, who was a "perfect and upright man" (Job 1:1), the same word used concerning Jacob.

Then we have Jacob, the pilgrim. He dwelt in tents. Then in Hos. 12:3, we read that Jacob had power with God. The margin says that Jacob was a prince, or behaved himself princely. Then in Heb. 11:21, we see Jacob as the priestly man. The word 'worship' is only used of Jacob in Hebrews 11. "He worshipped leaning upon the top of his staff." Jacob was a man who blessed Pharaoh in Gen. 47:10. In Gen. 48:15, He blessed Joseph. In Heb. 11:21, He blessed the two sons of Joseph. Finally, he was a man who blessed God.

The Name Underneath

H P Barker

Long ago there lived in the land of Egypt an architect named Cnidius. He was employed by the Pharaoh of that day to build a watch-tower to warn mariners from certain dangerous rocks upon the coast. When the tower was nearly finished, Cnidius had his own name engraved on a stone in the wall, and then covered it with plaster. On the outside of the plaster he inscribed in golden letters the name of Pharaoh.

The cunning architect knew very well that as the years rolled by the waves would wash away the plaster, and that then his own name would stand out before the eyes of men, and be handed down to successive generations. His motive is apparent. Self-love and the desire for fame were uppermost in his heart, though carefully veiled under disguise of service to his king.

In the balances of the sanctuary motives weigh very heavily. Words and deeds are weighed, but motives, secret desires and intentions, the designs of the heart, outweigh them all; and at the judgment seat of Christ, when our lives are passed in review under His searching eye, motives will be of much account. "The fire shall try every man's work," and the Lord will take up the question with His servants as to "how much every man had gained by trading." But the question will not only be, "How much?" but, "Of what sort?" (1 Cor. 3:13) The valuation in that day will be made according to quality as well as quantity. And the quality depends on the motives.

It is easy to be zealous of works that are called "good," and to cover our activities with a coat of plaster whereon the name of "Christ" is inscribed in large letters that all may see. But what when the plaster covering is washed off? Whose name will then be seen? Will our own names appear engraved upon the

stone that is behind the plaster? In other words, will our actions, our works, or deeds of service be found, "in that day," to have sprung from motives that will obtain the commendation of Christ, or from motives that have self as their object?

These are searching questions, and we shall do well to give them a place in our thoughts.

The Changeless Christ

Hebrews 1:12; 8:8; 13:8

The permanence of the new order of things (*i.e.* of Christianity), in contrast with the temporal nature of things under the law is a prominent theme in the epistle to the Hebrews. It was necessary that those accustomed to what was visible and tangible in their worship should be taught that they were now introduced to a sphere where only faith was in exercise, and where the objects of faith were not less but more real than those specially before Old Testament saints. Yet not only did the remnant of Israel, "according to the election of grace," need to be enlightened as to the immutable basis upon which all the spiritual blessings of the believer are founded, but the saints of every succeeding age have and do find amazing comfort in the remembrance that the whole christian edifice is reared upon the Impregnable Rock, Christ Jesus.

It was always the ordinary expectation of the Jew that Messiah, when He came, would bring in something lasting as well as blessed. As the people said to the Lord, "We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth forever" (John 7:34). But the cross seemed to put an end to all such hopes. And so in point of fact it did, as far as present earthly realization was concerned. But through the superabundant grace of God it nevertheless became the introduction to heavenly blessings, which were on that account so much the more real and permanent.

This is the central theme of the epistle to the Hebrews, wherein the all-important fact is established that Jesus Christ is the One to Whom the believer has to look for every blessing he enjoys, both now and evermore; and, above all, that upon Him no change can come. The ancient system of ordinances was vanishing away to make room for the substance of which it was but a shadow. This and more the Holy Spirit unfolds in detail. But though Moses and Aaron, Elijah, and the prophets had been superseded, the work of the Man, Christ Jesus, was as changeless as His person was infinite and unvarying.

In Hebrews 1, accordingly, the glories of the Lord Jesus are set forth. And it is as the incarnate Son that He is therein viewed; for this is in keeping with an

epistle addressed to the remnant of that nation to whom He came as the chosen messenger of the Most High. Hence the apostle does not commence in the unthinkable ages of a past eternity as does John in the Gospel, but at the moment when Messiah was born in time as God's spokesman. How He exceeds in virtue of His intrinsic worth all that was revered under the law! For could prophets be compared for one moment with Him Who ranked as Son, Who was both Creator and Inheritor of all things, besides being now enthroned on high as the great Sin-Purger? Angels, too, He infinitely transcended. Though in grace He became a servant, the more excellent name of Son is His inalienable heritage. They, as the scriptures abundantly prove, were created for a state of servitude beyond which they can never advance; moreover by the homage they render the First-begotten when He cometh into the world, they testify to His divine superiority.

Again, the Psalms are cited to show that the Son is therein addressed as God (Ps. 45:6, 7). And as if anticipating the objection of a captious Jew that rulers and magistrates were similarly designated in the same book (Ps. 82:6), another scripture is advanced in which the incommunicable Name is ascribed to Him. "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands; they shall perish but thou remainest, and they all shall wax old as doth a garment, and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail" (Heb. 1:10-11, Ps. 102:25-27). "Jesus" to Him (Matt. 1:21) was not a mere appellation, as to the son of Nun, but accurately descriptive of His person and work as Jehovah the Saviour.

Indeed, the word is the more striking since it is quoted from Psalm 102., wherein the solitude and humiliation of the suffering Messiah are vividly portrayed. It is there we read, "For my days are consumed like smoke," and "My days are like a shadow that declineth: and I am withered like grass," and again, "He weakened my strength in the way; he shortened my days. I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days" (Ps. 102:3, 11, 23, 24). This is the "prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed and poureth out his complaint before Jehovah" (Ps. 102 inscription). And this cry from the depths is immediately followed by the remarkable declaration of the immutability of His person, ascribed to him at the very moment of his apparent weakness (Ps. 102:12, 24-27). The heavens and the earth, His own handiwork, and the recognized emblems of the stability among men, shall perish in contrast with His everlasting existence.

Thus, before the Spirit of God speaks of "eternal salvation" (chap. 5:9), the "unchanging priesthood" (chap. 8), "eternal redemption" (chap. 9:12), "eternal

inheritance" (chap. 9:15), the ever-efficacious sacrifice, (chap. 10), the "immovable kingdom" (chap. 12:28), the "everlasting covenant" (chap. 12:20), He reveals the wondrous truth of the person of the Lord Jesus from Whom the blessings enumerated take their character of "eternal." Because He is the same and His years un failing, His work abides without decay. Because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever, the luster of the believer's portion in Him is undimmed, its value undiminished, and its possession unalterably secure.

How good of our God to give us (ourselves changeful in a changing scene where nothing is dependable) One Who is unchanging and in Whom we, and all we possess that is worth possessing, are secured from the deprivations of the foe and from the corruption of evil within and around us. May we with tenacity of faith lay hold of this blessed attribute of the person of the Lord which alone can keep us "stedfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," (1 Cor. 15:58).

W.J.H.

Change..... Good or Bad?

Joel Portman

Changes are an integral part of life. Societal development causes adaptive changes. Growing older also forces changes in activities and lifestyle. Modern inventions have changed our way of work, transportation, information, and communication. We recognize the reality of change in many ways. Life is never static, neither is our world.

In this changing world, how much should the lives of believers change? By 'change,' we mean change in spiritual respects, practices, or methods. How much change is acceptable or Scriptural in local assemblies? Should we continue to hold to certain practices and activities, or should we be willing to change and adapt to different methods or practices? Some brethren advocate radical changes to adapt to our modern world and to utilize different methods today. Others react against any change, even resisting any alteration in the smallest point. What is right and what can we learn from God's Word?

God is Unchanging

First of all, it is comforting to believers to know that our God is the same One, who never changes, who is constant in His purposes and principles, One who we can depend on in every changing circumstance of life. He has the title of the Everlasting God, "the same, yesterday, today and forever," (Heb. 13:8). He says to Israel at the close of their sad, Old Testament history, "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed," (Mal. 3:6). It was because of His unchanging and unchangeable promise made to

Abraham (Gen. 12:2, 13:14-17, 18:17-18) that the nation yet existed and that His desires were to bless them. In Jer. 31:3, the Lord says, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love..." and on the basis of His unchanging purpose, He will yet bless, restore and establish Israel as the head of all the nations of the earth (Rom. 11:26-27). Balaam, looking on Israel from the mount, said, "God is not a man that He should lie; neither the son of man that He should repent: Hath He not said it, and shall he not do it? ... He hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it," (Num. 23:19-20). As believers today, we rest on God's unchanging purposes, the certainty of His Word and His promises to us. What has been written gives a believer confidence because it is not simply man's promises, but rather the certain Word of God that is forever settled in heaven, (Psalm 119:89). It is the work of Christ that has saved and redeemed us, and it is His Word that gives us confidence and assurance (1 Jn. 5:13). He is always true to His Word.

To say that God is unchanging does not mean that He doesn't work in different ways at different times conforming to changing circumstances. The dispensations (administrations) of Scripture indicate different ways through which God has dealt with men, as man is found under different conditions. Each dispensation has its own characteristics, and each one has proved man's failure due to sin and God's sovereign grace to fulfill His will. Yet fundamentally, God is an unchanging God, always true to Himself, never deviating from His ultimate purpose nor invalidating His own character. What He has purposed to do will be accomplished, ultimately setting a Man in dominion over the universe, even though Adam failed in the beginning.

Change in the History of Israel

Turning to the record of man's history, we learn that man has always tended to change. This is true in many ways, but we are mostly concerned with spiritual changes. Without any doubt, there were changes in Israel's mode of living as they progressed from being nomadic families to living in Egypt, then to living in the cities and villages in the land. There was change as the tabernacle gave way to the temple. There were other changes that lay within the purpose of God for His people.

However, there were changes that resulted from their departure, their failure to obey God's Word and their dissatisfaction with the path God had given them. Joy at the Red Sea crossing (Ex. 15:1-18) very quickly changed to murmuring (Ex. 15:24). Willing obedience to Moses' leadership changed into rebellion under Korah, Dathan and Abiram, (Num. 16) and refusal to enter the land (Num. 14). Eagerness to contribute to God's house (Ex. 35) changed into disdain for His offerings in Malachi 1:7-8. Examples are more numer-

ous than we can consider here, but others include their change of attitude toward the manna that God provided. No longer was it sweet and satisfying; it was like oil and they loathed it. (Ex. 16:31, Num. 11:7-9, 21:5). The manna was no different, but their attitude of dissatisfaction with God's provision made them resist eating it. Entering the land, they were commanded not to adopt the worship of the people who lived there, but in their failure to drive them out and to maintain their separation, they gradually adopted their religion as well. The idols were still evil and God hated them, but Israel no longer saw them as God did. Eventually, they wanted change in Samuel's days from God ruling over them to having a king rule over them (1 Sam. 8:4-9). Their cry was that they wanted to be like the nations around them, certainly a serious change from what God purposed, but one that He allowed. The change of the Levites' shoulders carrying the ark to the use of a cart in David's time resulted in God's judgment because of their carelessness (2 Sam. 6:3). Ahaz caused a change when he substituted an altar copied from a pagan temple for the brazen altar in the temple (2 Kings 16:10-16).

Remembering that the things concerning Israel were written for our learning and were our examples (Romans 15:4, 1 Cor. 10:11), it seems that most (not all) change that God records resulted from a change in their hearts, an alteration in their attitudes and failure in their fidelity to the Lord. When they were away from God in heart, they expressed their natural desires by wanting to adopt the practices of the heathen around them or by introducing substitutions for the simplicity and reality of God's desires. There are numerous examples of this in the history of Israel under the judges, in Jeroboam's apostasy (despite God's promises), in some of the kings of Judah, and in the latter days recorded in the prophets. The wise man in Prov. 24:21 warns his son against involvement with those who no longer fear the Lord and the king, but are rebelling, "My son, fear thou the Lord and the king; and meddle not with them that are given to change" (or "Those that seek to set aside the worship of the true God, or the authority of the true king, who represents Him," Barnes Notes) or as Adam Clark puts it, "those who are always for making experiments on modes of government, forms of religion, etc." That attitude indicates dissatisfaction with the order and pattern that God has instituted, and we see it in our world today as well.

In contrast to this, God blessed and recognized those who returned to His pattern and to obedience to His Word, such as Asa in his early days, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, as well as the remnant that returned from Babylon in the book of Ezra. National recovery and the evidence of God's blessing resulted when this took place. Days of revival among the people were not the result of their adopting new patterns or activities, but rather from returning to what God had instructed them

to do in the beginning. This is always a characteristic of revival among God's people. E. M. Bounds said, "The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men," (*Power through Prayer*). Again quoting him, "The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men ... What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use -- men of prayer, men mighty in prayer." This is true in every day. Flashy innovations or methods that appeal to the flesh (whether sinners or saints) are not God's way, nor do they result in the blessing that we long for.

What changes should we make?

Obviously, there are changes that believers or assemblies may make that still maintain faithfulness to the Scriptures and divine principles. For example, we know that God's order is that believers remember the Lord every Lord's Day (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:1-2), but the time of day, its length, and other aspects of this meeting are not legislated by God's Word, nor do we have principles involved. However, to put the Lord's Supper on another day of the week for our convenience, to "break bread" outside the fellowship of an established assembly gathering, or to substitute wafers or individual cups for the one loaf and cup, etc., would be contrary to Scripture. Space doesn't permit consideration of other examples.

What should we do today? Accepting that some changes are expected with time, and that some might be necessary, we don't want to be like those who hold old customs and practices that don't have a Scriptural foundation, such as religious groups that legislate rules forbidding their members to drive automobiles or have electricity in their homes. Such rules have no Scriptural basis and end in legalistic bondage in which rules become multiplied without reason, sometimes illogically. However, changes should be considered very seriously and Scripturally to make sure that they do not introduce compromises with Biblical principles or practices that will lead to future deterioration of Christian testimony. Changes that may seem beneficial and acceptable presently may result in future, unforeseen consequences. Some "assemblies" in the past began a downward spiral of departure when they introduced changes that certain ones desired, but which only led to further decline in principles. Changes may be justified by the use of Scripture, but those changes may not, in reality, be scriptural if they lead farther away from the truth.

Suggestions

May we suggest that any essential changes should be subject to these considerations:

1. What is the motivation for the change? Why do

we want to change? Is it for convenience, personal desires, selfish motivations? If changes are made for those reasons, will they possibly cause future changes that will only introduce more departure through following personal desires?

2. Is the Lord genuinely leading in this direction, and is this change one that is according to His will? Searching Scripture is essential along with waiting on the Spirit of God to give definite guidance so we will know that this is not a change coming from man but from the Lord. Can we truly say that this does not violate any precept, practice or principle of God's Word?

3. Can the assembly be in agreement in making this change? Is it simply the mind of certain ones who have more power or control in the assembly, or can the assembly truly agree? Will it add to the unity of the testimony, or will it cause underlying problems and dissent?

4. Do we want to make this change because other "successful churches" of our world have done something similar and have had success? Are we just imitating their methods and introducing them into a local assembly because it seems to work where they have practiced it? God's assembly is never intended to be like "churches" around us. A greater emphasis on spirituality and personal exercise benefits more than superficial changes in methods or practices.

Other considerations may be involved, but we make these suggestions so that we might guard the distinctive character of a local assembly, so that each assembly might continue as a lampstand for Christ in the darkness of this world (Rev. 1:12) and as a "pillar and ground (stay) of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15).

Change can be necessary, but not all change is good.

2 Timothy 2

Steve Walvatne, West Union, IA

Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy is the last of his inspired writings. Composed in a Roman prison, it throbs with affection for Timothy, his "beloved child" in the faith (1:2). Its chief concern is for testimony in "last days," even as Paul faces his own last days upon earth. In 1 Timothy Paul wrote of "latter times" (4:1) or "late times," but conditions had worsened since then. Now it's "last days" (3:1), ones that are "uttermost" or "extreme." They're "perilous times" – "Perilous," says John Darby, "because of the 'form of godliness'" that abounds. In other words, *formality* was overshadowing *reality* even as Paul wrote.

There's a past, present, and future element to this epistle. Alfred Plummer refers to this in his book, *The Pastoral Epistles*: "In the first chapter the Apostle looks back over the past; in the second, he gives directions about the present; in the third he looks forward into the future. These divisions are not observed with rigidity throughout, but they hold good to a very considerable extent." That second part of Plummer's outline we'll consider here, not verse by verse, but illustration by illustration, seeking instruction for Christian workers in days which undoubtedly, are the "last days" of this age. We'll observe eight ways Paul depicted Timothy, under the headings of:

- | | | |
|----|---------------------|------------------|
| 1. | A CHILD | v.1 |
| 2. | A CHANNEL | v.2 |
| 3. | A COMBATANT | vv. 3, 4 |
| 4. | A COMPETITOR | v.5 |
| 5. | A CULTIVATOR | v.6 |
| 6. | A CRAFTSMAN | v.15 |
| 7. | A CONTAINER | vv.20, 21 |
| 8. | A COUNSELOR | vv.24, 25 |

A CHILD

"Thou therefore, my child, be strong in the grace which [is] in Christ Jesus" (v.1; JND).

Timothy's timidity, Asian abandonment, and the examples of Paul and Onesiphorus in chapter 1, lead to this exhortation from Paul. He addresses "my child," not "my son" as in the AV. At conversion, saints become both the children and the sons of God instantly, but there's a difference in emphasis. "Child" emphasizes family relationship, while "son" emphasizes family rank and responsibility ("sonship," as in Eph. 1:5).

Paul thinks of Timothy as a father would. His words express concern and tenderness, knowing Timothy will soon be fatherless. The young man must be "strengthened" ("continually empowered," *Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown*) in the abundant outworking of God's grace if he's to prevail in "last days." John encouraged the same: "And now, little children, abide in Him..." (1 Jn. 2:28).

This was no mere sentiment from Paul. His own life gave testimony to these words. To the Philippians he wrote: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Php. 4:13). Timothy would appreciate Paul's example and concern. Doubtless, as the years passed, he read and reread these exhortations, drawing fresh sustenance from them. And with those years, he himself would prove their wisdom, as he found the strength for service not in self, but in his God.

The abundant grace of God remains the power source of every Christian worker yet. But its energy must be tapped. This requires a dependent spirit along with earnest supplication for divine enablement. Carnal assertion and gadgetry will never work, "for without Me, ye can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). But refusing human ingenuity for heavenly sovereignty comes hard. Just as we once struggled to obtain salvation by our own efforts, so now, we often struggle with spiritual issues in our own strength. May David's attitude be our attitude: "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee, and will **look up**" (Ps. 5:3).

A CHANNEL

"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (v.2).

Paul wanted Timothy to be a channel – a conduit of truth. He wasn't to stop truth's flow, but see that what he had learned from Paul was passed along to "trustworthy" men who in turn would dispense it to the next generation of believers. The requirement was steep. He was to transmit *exactly* what had been given him ("the same"), to individuals *expressly* qualified to receive and communicate it.

A clean channel only conducts what flows into it. It alters nothing. So it is with faithful men. They impart Scriptural truth, "in season, out of season" (4:2), holding nothing back. While gift is good, faithfulness is better. "As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him: for he refresheth the soul of his masters" (Pr. 25:13).

Unclean channels were increasing in Paul's day and Timothy's would only get worse. False teachers were corrupting the stream of sound doctrine, overthrowing "the faith of some" (v.18). Timothy was to shun their "irreverent," "useless" talk (v.16), for like cancer, it gnawed at the soul of its victims. But contrariwise, "The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times" (Ps. 12:6). Christian workers do well in staying close to the Scriptures. Infinite truth can reside in the smallest word (e.g. "so": Jn. 3:16; Heb. 2:3; etc.), and the slightest deviation from Scriptural terminology can distort the intended meaning. "In these days," said John Heading, "there is much slipshod quoting of the Scriptures as if anything will do. Modern translations do not help in this matter" (*Daily Bible Readings*). May the Lord raise up clear channels, who like Ezra and his associates, "read in the Book of the Law of God *distinctly*, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (Neh. 8:8).

A COMBATANT

“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 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” (vv.3, 4).

In this metaphor, Paul exhorts Timothy to *suffering* and *separation*. Verse 3 literally reads: “Take thy share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” Paul didn’t need to convince Timothy that a spiritual battle raged; Timothy knew full well what the apostle and fellow saints were facing. What he did need, however, was encouragement to suffer for righteousness’ sake (Matt. 5:10; 1 Pet. 3:14). A good soldier endures all manner of pain, suffering, and distress. Sometimes the strain is mental, sometimes physical. It may involve captivity or death. How tempting to evade such unpleasantness: to let others bear the brunt of combat! “No!” says Paul. “Take thy share in suffering as a good soldier.” “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17).

The “praiseworthy” combatant is no traitor to the heavenly cause. He refuses to compromise in the face of reproach. He wears the Christian insignia proudly. Worldly attitudes, activities, and adornment are beneath the dignity of the standard he bears. Ah Demas! If only you’d been praiseworthy, and not left Paul “in the lurch” when he needed you most! Ah Corinthians! How could you “reign as kings” while fellow brethren were being martyred? (1 Cor. 4:8, 9).

Too many lose focus. They get distracted and forfeit heaven’s commendation. Good combatants concentrate; they “avoid absorption” (H. Harvey: *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*) in things that dull the spirit. Legitimate attention is one thing, entanglement is another. Stephen Ambrose illustrates the soldier’s dedication in his book, *The Supreme Commander*. Its subject, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, received notice of his father’s death while serving at the War Department in Washington D.C. during World War II. Writes Ambrose:

“Eisenhower confessed that he felt terrible. ‘I should like so much to be with my mother these few days.’ He could not, for ‘we’re at war! And the war is not soft – it has no time to indulge even the deepest and most sacred emotions.’ On March 11 [1942] his father was buried. For thirty minutes Eisenhower closed his office door and shut off all business, ‘to have that much time by myself, to think of him’...At 7:30 p.m. Eisenhower noted simply, ‘I love my Dad,’ closed his office, and went home.

‘I haven’t the heart to go on tonight.’”

A COMPETITOR

“And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully” (v.5).

To “strive for masteries” meant to contend in the public games. These Grecian contests were huge throughout Greece and Paul frequently derived spiritual lessons from them. Athletes strove for the laurel wreath (the victor’s crown), but as Paul notes, they had to “strive lawfully.” There were rules to observe and obey. “No rules, no wreath’ was the order of the day,” writes John Stott in *The Message of 2 Timothy*.

In like manner, Christian workers have rules too. This is Paul’s point. Though not under Law, the spiritual competitor is not lawless. The Scriptures set forth many principles and precepts that govern the spiritual contender. “Cheaters” will be exposed and disqualified. Paul trembled at this and buffeted his body, bringing it into subjection, “lest that by any means, when [he had] preached to others, [he himself] should be a castaway (disqualified, disapproved)” (1 Cor. 9:27).

At a recent marathon in London, the crown for “fastest pensioner” went to a 69-year-old man. Six weeks later, he was stripped of the honor when judges discovered he’d taken a shortcut, clipping 10 miles off a 26 mile course. Some spiritual contenders do the same. They circumvent Scripture believing that the ends justify the means. But the Lord is watching. No competitor will mistakenly don a victor’s crown at the Judgment Seat of Christ. There, the Lord will “bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts” (1 Cor. 4:5). God’s irrevocable principle is, “See...that thou make (“do”) all things according to the pattern...” (Heb. 8:5).

A CULTIVATOR

“The husbandman that laboreth must be first to partake of the fruits” (v.6).

Paul’s word for “labor” captures the essence of a cultivator’s work. It denotes “constant, exhausting, manual labor” (C. Spicq: *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*). Paul knew what this was. As an experienced Christian cultivator, he could say without boasting, “I have labored more abundantly than they all” (1 Cor. 15:10, referring to other apostles). Unlike the hypocrites who “have their reward” (Matt. 6), the Christian cultivator toils unseen. Yet he is seen, for “the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Pr. 15:3).

Fruit, however, needs time to mature, so the

husbandman looks ahead. With patience, he anticipates the harvest, that day when he'll have first claim to the fruit. "Beyond warfare is victory, beyond athletic effort a prize, and beyond agricultural labor, a crop" (Barrett; *The Pastoral Epistles*). So too with Christian cultivators. Said the Preacher: "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days" (Ecc. 11:1). Brian Currie's comment in *What the Bible Teaches: Ecclesiastes*, merits extended quoting here:

"The labour of prayer, the hours spent in the study of God's Word, the sacrifices made to visit the shut-in saints, whether the cost is physical, mental, financial, or social, will all be more than adequately rewarded when [God] is heard to say, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy lord' (Matt. 25:21-23). The problem to be faced in all this is the time period between sowing and harvesting, but faith grasps the delightful promise, 'Thou shalt find it.'"

Good Christian cultivators also tend their own field. They're not "be-all's" or "do-all's" who regularly "go-all" over. They labor, year in and year out in a divinely portioned sphere. That field may be large – often it is small – but they stick with it, seeking to "fulfill [their] ministry" (2 Tim. 4:5) to the glory of God. And what do they reap? Fruit. Fruit that abounds to their account (Php. 4:17), and which promotes the deepest of affection – "My brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown" (Php. 4:1).

A CRAFTSMAN

"Strive diligently to present thyself approved to God, a workman that has not to be ashamed, cutting in a straight line the Word of Truth" (v.15; JND).

In contrast to Hymenaeus and Philetus in verse 17, Paul wanted Timothy to be a skilled worker. Their erroneous efforts were subverting the faith of some, demanding disapproval. Timothy was to eschew such workmanship. All rough-cuts, miss-cuts, or short-cuts with the Word of God were inexcusable. His cuts were to be straight; he was to handle the Scriptures aright. "For we are not as many," said Paul, "which corrupt the Word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ" (2 Cor. 2:17). A true spiritual craftsman "takes each section of truth and fits it into its correct position as a mason does a stone, allowing no part to usurp an undue place and so knock the whole structure out of balance" (William Barclay: *The Daily Study Bible Series*).

Unacceptable workmanship among Christian workers will increase in "last days," due partially to a dimin-

ished appetite for "sound doctrine" by professing saints (4:3, 4). Many will "heap" to themselves teachers that will tickle their ears, preaching only what they want to hear. The word "heap" anticipates a "pile" or abundant supply of such teachers. Paul raised this alert in Acts 20:29, 30. It's reminiscent of Israel's inhabitants, who said to the prophets, "Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits" (Isa. 30:10). If this be our cry, both craftsman and congregation will suffer loss at the Judgment Seat of Christ, when the discerning eye of God tries every man's work, "of what sort it is" (1 Cor. 3:13). How awful to be "ashamed" in that day!

A CONTAINER

"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself of these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (vv.20, 21).

In these two verses, Paul visualizes a splendorous house possessed of costly and common vessels. The gold and silver containers had one use, the wood and clay another. To be used, however, they had to be honorable, or as the context implies, clean. So the Christian worker: if he's to be filled for spiritual service, he'll have to be clean. While all believers are positionally clean at conversion, the practical "purging" of daily defilement is necessary, as conveyed in John 13. The word for "purging" occurred earlier in 1 Corinthians 5:7, where the assembly was responsible to "purge" unclean leaven from its midst. Here though, it's individual purging, which if done consistently, would limit the need for assembly purging.

Three things mark purged Christians. First, *capability* for service: they're "sanctified" or "set apart" for divine purpose. Then *suitability*: they're "meet" or "fit" for the Master's use. And lastly, *availability*: they're "prepared" or "ready" for every excellent work.

Are we clean? Or, is the container defiled by a sinful residue? "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word" (Ps. 119:9). Are we available? Or, is the container filled with fleshly pursuit? "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2). However commendable our cause, its outcome will be marred if the flesh remains unjudged. May we seek like Timothy, to be clean containers in "last days."

A COUNSELOR

"And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God perad-

venture will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth” (vv.24, 25).

As a “bondservant” of the Lord, Timothy was to “instruct” or “set right” (JND) those that “oppose themselves.” That latter expression comprised the false teachers and those affected by them. They were “opponents” (Weymouth) or “those contentiously disposed” (HCG Moule) to faithful teachers. Men of that caliber are often cantankerous and full of spite. Timothy wasn’t to imitate their unrighteous behavior; he “must not strive” or “quarrel” (vv.16, 17, 23), but be like his Lord (Matt. 12:19). This doesn’t suggest a passiveness towards truth, but contempt for the flagrant attitudes and worthless debates of these opponents.

Good Christian counselors are “gentle” or “mild.” They’re approachable. And they possess teaching capabilities that enable them to admonish and exhort (4:2). They’re “forbearing,” even when wronged – another of those spiritual traits contrary to nature. The experienced counselor “acts” rather than “reacts.” He takes the lead in contrary situations and exudes a proper temperament in “gently” setting the opposition right. Where false teachers seek to ravage, Christian counselors seek to restore, for theirs is “not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God” (1 Cor. 2:12).

In chapter 3 Paul emphasizes the attitude of men in “last days.” The list is stunning. Arrogance, selfishness, deception, and a host of other things will prevail unchecked. And a current of fierce hatred will undermine it all. This trend is upon us now. Are Christian workers going to adopt some of these same attitudes? We dare not. Spiritual guides should be Christian gentlemen; men in whom is no guile (Ps. 32:2; 1 Thess. 2:3), whose great motivation is love to Christ and thus to His people.

And so Paul closes the second section of his last letter. In one sense, he ends where he began – with the grace of God. We could sum things up by Jude’s word, “Keep yourselves in the love of God” (v.21). Whether our emphasis be that of a spiritual child, channel, combatant, competitor, cultivator, craftsman, container, or counselor, we need to move in the sunshine of God’s gracious love: “To keep it, increase it, and discover it in all the operations of it” (Thomas Manton; *Commentary on Jude*).

What is Fellowship?

Franklin Ferguson

It is quite a common thing to say that such and such a Christian is “in fellowship.” The thought is that they belong to a certain Assembly of saints, and are “breaking bread” with them. But is this all that

“fellowship” really implies? By no means. It is fellowship as far as it goes, but it falls far short of the full import of the truth.

Fellowship is partnership, the sharing of things in common; that is, there is a sharing in common of all that pertains to an Assembly—its privileges, its testimony, and its responsibilities. And this is a far different thing to the prevalent but inadequate idea of the Scriptural conception of fellowship.

To be welcomed among a company of saints who gather in the Lord’s Name alone, owning the Lordship of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, having no creed or constitution but the Word of God; this is a wonderful privilege and should never be lightly esteemed. Fellowship embraces all the Assembly stands for. We are helpers together of one another in maintaining and strengthening all that we have been taught of God, and hold dear. There is a fellowship on the Lord’s day morning in the “breaking of bread” in loving remembrance of the Lord’s death, till He comes; a fellowship in the evening in the Assembly’s Gospel testimony; a fellowship in the weekly prayer-meeting, and in the weekly Bible-reading or gathering for ministry; a fellowship in all the Assembly’s activities, its gifts and expenses.

Do we merely “break bread,” or are we really “in fellowship”? Do we realize both our privilege and responsibility concerning the Assembly in all its bearings? Look where we will, we can find nothing better and more in accord with New Testament principles than what we hold; and this is true even in the face of confessed weakness and failure in giving expression to Divine truths. “To whom shall we go?” (John 6:68).

There is a serious leakage in Assemblies: young life that ought to be present is drifting elsewhere. This drift might be stemmed by teachers and elders themselves holding more firmly to the truths we have learned; in giving more of their presence, time and help in the meetings, in the building up of the believers in their “most holy faith,” feeding the flock with food convenient.

Let us do all we can to maintain a collective testimony for our Lord, in a day when much of His will is rejected, distorted, or neglected; to be “watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die”; and in view of His coming quickly, to “hold fast that which we have, that no man take our crown” (Rev. 3:2, 8, 11).

The Bible is always a new book to those well acquainted with it. No believer can flourish in the ways of Christ, unless it be his custom to deal with God by the Word in the closet.

Robert C. Chapman