

The Nature of the Church (2)

—William Kelly

It may be assumed, I trust, that Christians who read these pages believe that there is still real power to evangelise the world and to edify the Church. If so, where does it come from? The natural man knows nothing but natural things, and can neither receive nor communicate the things of the Spirit of God. Real, spiritual power is of Him. Who of us believers is not a witness that this power still continues? Weakened and blunted, alas! it is; for He who works is grieved with all the sin, and confusion, and desolation around Him. But He does abide, and His power abides, and the way in which He acts, according to the Scripture cited, is "dividing to every man severally as He will." Clearly then He uses whom He pleases. He does not employ a humanly divided caste as a narrow and exclusive channel of His blessing. No: He does not vacate His sovereignty. It is not the pleasure, therefore, of a preacher, nor of a synod of preachers, nor of a congregation, nor of a sect, nay, nor of the true Church, much less of a worldly power. It is the Spirit of God. And He divides as He will. Again He divides to each, and every man (i.e., inside the Church), not this or that particular gift; but He does divide something for the common good — "to every man severally as He will."

Hence the order and action of the Church, as described in Scripture, depend upon the presence and the operations of the Holy Spirit. And if He be allowed free scope to work, it is, if we are in truth to follow God's Word, according to the pattern of "many members, yet but one body." He acts in the unity of the whole body. After this manner we shall find His testimony regulated, as is plain from the Acts and Epistles: and this, whether inside or outside the Church.

As for the testimony to those without, compare Acts 8:1,4; 11:20; 18:24-28; and Philippians 1:14. The mass or main part of the Church, scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, went everywhere preaching the gospel. Among them Philip was conspicuous in Samaria and elsewhere. If it be said that he was officially set apart, the answer is, It was to serve tables, not to preach the Word of God. The office was instituted so that the twelve, relieved from care touching this business, might give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. If Philip preached with power, if Stephen disputed with irresistible wisdom, and if both wrought miracles, none of these things was in virtue of an appointment which related simply and specifically to the daily ministrations. Compare Acts 6:6 with 4:35. Further, others of those dispersed "traveled as far as Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the Word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which when they were come to Antioch, spoke unto the Grecians (or rather Greeks), preaching the Lord Jesus." Did these brethren assume what was unjustifiable? Were they reprov'd even by the church at Jerusalem, where many were always ready to censure what seemed irregular? "Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord" (Acts 11:22-24).

At a later period Apollos "spoke and taught diligently the things of the Lord." He did this, when he knew only the baptism of John. Instructed more perfectly, through the instrumentality of a believer and his wife, who were as unauthorized as himself, he is soon found more active and honoured than ever: "he... helped them much which had believed through grace: for he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 18). At Rome, most of the brethren, waxing confident by the bonds of Paul, were much more bold to speak the Word without fear. It is true, the motives of all were not good; but this is a danger which no human restriction could ward off. Alas! motives baser even than these were necessarily introduced, when the so-called ministry of Christ became synonymous with a regular, respectable, and in some cases lucrative, profession. It was not so in apostolic days; yet even then, there were those who preached Christ of envy and strife, as well as others who preached of good will. What then says the large-hearted apostle? Does he propose to fetter that blessed liberty, because it was now abused by these unholy feelings? Nothing of the sort. "Notwithstanding every way," says he, "whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."

I need not quote other Scriptures less direct but equally showing the doctrine, not ordination, is the divine test for rejecting or receiving those who profess to be ministers of Christ. It is clear that several passages have been adduced which prove that all Christians who are able are at liberty, not to say are bound, to preach the gospel. Not one text can be brought forward which contradicts, limits, or qualifies the principle. Scripture never prescribes a human commission as a necessary preliminary to that work. On the contrary, the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 teaches, by its solemn judgment, the danger of waiting for other warrant than the fact that the Lord delivers to the servants His goods,

wherewith they are responsible to trade. To doubt the grace of the Master, to fear because one has not the authentication of those who presumptuously claim and trifle with His right, to bury the talent in the earth, is to act the part of the wicked and slothful servant. For the Lord of the harvest, to use another parable, has alone the title to send forth labourers (cf. Mt. 10 and Rom. 10). In a word, the question is not whether all Christians are qualified of God to preach the gospel, but whether those who are so qualified may not preach without waiting for any human authoritative call. Scripture, we have seen, decides that they may.

As for the testimony to those within, 1 Corinthians 14 shows plainly that the only restriction upon the exercise to gifts by brethren was this: "Let all things be done unto edifying." Women were positively forbidden to speak in the churches. Elsewhere they were responsible to use whatever gift the Lord imparted to them, subject to His Word. Thus Priscilla, no less than Aquila, takes Apollos and expounds to him the Word of God more perfectly (Acts 18:26). And the four daughters of Philip did prophesy (Acts 21:9), but not in the assemblies: the Spirit forbade that (1 Cor. 14:34-35). A woman was not allowed to teach nor to exercise authority over the man (1 Tim. 2:12). But all the brethren, as a whole, were exhorted to: "Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy." And of course they were to exercise their gifts as God empowered them, so that all things were done decently and in order.

Hence we read, "My brethren be not many masters" (i.e., "teachers" — Jas. 3:1). Such an exhortation would have been just as entirely out of place in modern arrangements, as it was suitable, wholesome, and needed in the case of those whom he addressed. His exhortation manifestly implied that there was an open ministry, which might very possibly be abused by the flesh, but which the Spirit, instead of closing or restricting, turned to the good of their souls by pressing upon them their direct responsibility to God. On the other hand, the entire family of God are exhorted not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits whether they are of God because many false prophets were gone out into the world (1 John 4:1). Even the elect lady (2 John 10) is told that if any come and bring not the doctrine of Christ, he is not to be received. Those who hear, as well as those who teach, have need to take heed. Responsibility is maintained on all sides: from this none can escape.

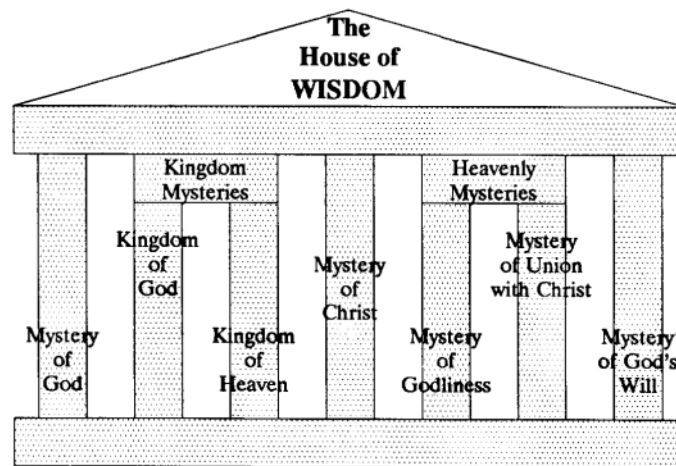
In Romans 12 we have the same thing, though from another point of view. "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, [let us prophesy] according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, [let us wait] on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, [let him do it] with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness." God's dealing to each was looked to, and not a mere human commission to one, or to a few. Hence faith came in, and each is exhorted to think soberly of himself, and to use what God has given him instead of pretending to more. We see not one member absorbing all the gifts, or hindering others, but many members, and yet but one body, having gifts differing, and exhorted to employ them, not merely through love, because we are every one members one of another, but because of the grace given on God's part.

So in Ephesians 4:4-16: "[There is] one body, and one Spirit... But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ... from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase to the body unto the edifying of itself in love." Colossians 2:19 is to the same effect: "The Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God."

And also 1 Peter 4:10-11 makes it a matter of positive obligation that, as each one hath received the gift, even so they should minister the same one to another. Thus, and thus only, should they be "good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." Can anything more clearly show that mere human restriction is perfectly shut out? Whatever came from God, and nothing else, was to be used and received without further sanction, that God might be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. From these Scriptures we learn also that the gifts from above were for the blessing of the whole body of Christ: not one for one particular section of the Church, and another for another; but all open to the whole Church, and the whole Church open to all.

To be cont'd

In the two preceding studies we have looked at six of the seven mysteries. In this one we will look at the last mystery and its tributaries.



The Mystery of God's Will

The mystery of God's will has four administrative mysteries that are relevant, or tributary, to it. Their subject is the administration of the Church in man's hands, and the administration of the 1000 year kingdom in the Lord's hands. With the Church, failure comes in, and one of the three administrative mysteries of the Church tells us how Christ deals with that failure. With the kingdom, Christ's administration is perfect, filling up the mystery of God's will.

a. The Pauline administration of the Church

This subject is really Paul's administration of the Church in the days of its youth and pristine freshness, and also the steps he took to perpetuate godly order after his departure from the Church.

Paul's stewardship of the mysteries of God

In Ephesians 3:9 Paul speaks about "the administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God." Then, Colossians 1:23 and 25 tell us that Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, was both a minister of the gospel and a minister of the Church. He was a faithful administrator, as he himself points out in 1 Corinthians 4:1-4, "Let a man so account of us as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." Paul held the Church together in the unity in which God established it during his lifetime, although his epistles make it clear that divisive elements were at work.

The mystery of the faith, Paul's insistence on godliness

Paul's concern for the administration of the Church is seen in Titus 1:5, "For this cause I left thee in Crete, that thou mightest go on to set right what remained unordered, and establish elders in each city, as I had ordered thee." While insisting on strict moral qualifications for elders and deacons, Paul, at the same time introduced the subject of the *mystery of the faith* (1 Tim. 3:9). He tells Timothy that the mystery of the faith is to be held in a pure conscience. To emphasize the importance of this requirement, Paul inserts it halfway between the moral qualifications of an elder and a deacon. After Paul's death these moral requirements were ignored. Church offices proliferated and were filled by men who advanced themselves by emulating the political principles of the world. Paul saw where that would lead, and made provision for darker days: "The things thou hast heard of me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, such as shall be competent to instruct others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

b. The mystery of the seven stars and the seven golden lamps

Paul had been faithful in the administration of the mystery as we have just seen. But he had forebodings of what would happen when he was gone. We see this in Acts 20, when he addressed the elders of Ephesus, "For I know this," he said, "that there will come in amongst you after my departure (after the Lord had taken him home) grievous wolves, not sparing the flock" (v. 29). Later, in Acts 27, we are given a picture of the subsequent breakup of the Church's unity in the story of Paul's shipwreck. It was caused by ignoring what Paul said. The Lord holds man responsible for this, because Paul's words were commandments of the Lord. To show that this is so, the Lord chose seven assemblies out of the many of that day to pass judgment on the Church as a corporate entity. Except for Ephesus, they were relatively obscure.¹ But they were all located in the Roman province of Asia, the landmark of Paul's ministry. Ephesus, the crown of that ministry, whose elders Paul had warned, is addressed first. Consequently these seven assemblies were representative of the Church as a whole, over which Paul was the minister.

The setting of the Lord's judgment on the Church is the Isle of Patmos, where He appears to John. There is a duality in the Lord's words spoken after His appearance. First they were messages for seven actual assemblies at the time. Secondly they looked down the centuries that lay ahead, giving us in their entirety the Lord's judgment on the Church corporately from beginning to end. The latter aspect is truly Church history, predicted in advance with divine foreknowledge. Many excellent histories of the Church have been written, but none as condensed and penetrating as this. The mystery assures us that the Lord is judging the Church corporately, for He himself said that the seven lamps are the seven churches. The seven stars are the angels (i.e., representatives) of the seven churches, but there is nothing to tell us who they are. The Lord apportions praise and censure. While there are bright spots, His words to Sardis, "I have not found thy works complete before My God," detect failure.

Before closing this subject, the broad aspect of the Lord's words should be noted. He is not exclusively addressing the true Church, but in some cases that which takes His Name in profession only. An example would be Revelation 3:16, "I am about to spue thee out of My mouth," which He would never do to His own. This observation will help us to understand the mystery of the woman later on.

c. A parenthesis

Here we need a parenthesis to explain why the mystery of God's will, our last mystery, cannot be understood until the mystery of God is finished. At this point two mysteries which bring the mystery of God to a conclusion must be explained, for they are the gateways to the concluding mystery of God's will, the last of the administrative mysteries, which also concludes our study.

The mystery of the woman

This mystery can best be understood by comparing "the woman" with the bride of Christ, and their roles relative to the Lord and His angel. Not only does the Book of Revelation open and close with the Lord and His angel, but at the approximate opening and closing of the text itself we find the Lord and His angel separately revealing a mystery. At the beginning the Lord reveals the mystery of His judgment on the true Church, at the end His angel reveals the mystery of His judgment on the false Church. But what a difference there is in the character of the judgments! With the true Church, His bride, His judgments take the form of praise or rebuke, they can be nothing more, for He has borne our sins, and at the end the bride is seen in glory. The Lord's judgments on the false harlot Church end in her utter destruction, for strong is the Lord God who judges her. The true bride of Christ is the subject of heavenly mysteries, so the angel takes John to a great and high mountain to see her. But, although *mystery* is written on the harlot's forehead, there are no heavenly springs in her, so the angel takes John to a desert to view her.² Nor do we find heavenly wisdom in her mystery. Rather it is what James 3:15 speaks of, "This is not the wisdom which comes down from above, but earthly, natural, devilish." The woman may think that she has a mystery for her initiates, but God has a different thought. "Come here," His angel says to John, "I will show thee the sentence of the great harlot." The mystery of the woman is that God will judge her, and remove her from the earth. Why does God judge her? Because she opposed God's testimony on the earth, for John saw her drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs. Then she also committed fornication with the kings of the earth (i.e., usurped what belonged to Christ and ruled the world by her corrupt principles). God tolerates her until she is

¹ *Their relative obscurity causes us to investigate why they should be chosen instead of Corinth or Thessalonica. The answer is, that each assembly symbolizes a later and sequential development in the history of the Church. As the ages have rolled along the obscurity has lifted. Various writers have identified each assembly in its historical setting.*

² *The angel in Rev. 17:1 is probably the same as in Rev. 21:9, for both are identified as one of the seven angels which had the seven bowls. John adds in the latter verse: "Come here, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." So God is glorified in judgment and in blessing.*

found sitting on the scarlet coloured beast, the last form of imperial rule in the earth. Then in Revelation 17:7 the angel says, "I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast which carries her."

The mystery of the beast who carries the woman

The scarlet coloured beast who carries the woman is the political head of the revived Roman Empire. The angel tells John the mystery of the beast. This beast receives his power from ten kings who hate the woman. The reason is obvious, the woman is controlling the beast, their recognized political head, just as a horsewoman would control her horse. Men of the world resent religious interference in their political affairs, but historically Satan has ruled the world by a skilful blend of religion and politics. The woman astride the beast simply illustrates the principle of the religious element controlling the world's politics in its full-blown development. Why then does Satan not resist the destruction of his own well-honed tool of world rule? Simply because at the end time he wants to enjoy the undivided worship of this himself through the beast and his image, and the woman frustrates that longing. The mystery of lawlessness culminates in the worship of this man as soon as the woman is destroyed. The next step is to make war with the Lamb. How foolish to strive with our Creator. In Revelation 10:7 we read, "But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound the trumpet, the mystery of God also shall be completed." So severe will be God's judgments on the nations that no one will ever again question His apparent failure to judge evil. All opposition to Christ's rule of the earth will be swept away. The mystery of God will be finished, and the mystery of His will, our closing consideration, will be understood.

d. The mystery of God's will

This is the last and most majestic of the administrative mysteries. It is the last because it comes in when all attempts at human administration have failed. It is the most majestic because the will of God is the spring of all things.

Paul communicates this ultimate mystery to us in Ephesians 1:9-10, "Having made known to us *the mystery of His will...* for the administration of the fullness of times; to head up all things in the Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth." Thus the mystery of God's will is that His Son in manhood will head up a divine administration, and rule the universe. That is why, although Satan may rule the earth at present, it is a restrained rule, for God will never allow any man to rule the world completely except Christ. This principle is found in Ezekiel 21:27, "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it! This also shall be no more, *until He come whose right it is; and I will give it to Him.*" Armed with this knowledge, the Christian knows the world will pass away, though great wars threaten, or mighty nations struggle for the unattainable goal of world dominion. They build their empires but they all crumble away. Our portion is connected with what will never pass away: a share in Christ's future administration of the universe. We read of this in 1 Peter 1:4, "An incorruptible and undefiled and unfading *inheritance*, reserved in the heavens for you." This inheritance closes off the passage in Ephesians 1:7-11 which unveils the mystery of God's will, "In whom we have also obtained an inheritance." May we value that inheritance, and the words which will show that we did, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

A Parting Look at the Seven Pillars in Wisdom's house

We have now completed our grand tour of Wisdom's house, and admired the seven pillars she has hewn out to support it. Surely we can now form an overall impression of their grandeur.

It is evident that three pillars bear God's Name. At one end of the house is the pillar of the mystery of God, at the other end the pillar of the mystery of God's will, and in the centre the pillar of the mystery of Christ. Four pillars flank the mystery of Christ, two on each side. Let us say that the two pillars on the left are the kingdom mysteries, and the two pillars on the right the Church mysteries.

Now we can understand the overall plan of the mysteries. We begin at the mystery of God, where we learn that God is not presently judging evil, but will do so at His appointed time. Because of God's temporary toleration of evil, man crucified Christ, and He lost the kingdom of this world for a season. We might say that He then moved the seat of His kingdom to heaven, and the kingdom itself became moral to those who love Him. The heavenly mysteries of Christ and His Assembly are now God's interests. But eventually God will judge the world, and unveil the mystery of His will. That is the ultimate mystery, for it tells us that Christ will rule over all things, sharing that rule with His heavenly bride.

As we leave Wisdom's house, let us remember the exhortation in 2 Peter 3:11, "What ought ye to be in holy conversation and godliness."

The End

Outline For Bible Study (45)

93. Judah Goes into Captivity. The Story of Jeremiah. — 2 Kings 23:31-25:30; 2 Chronicles 36; Jeremiah 36-40

Outline

1. Jehoiakim The First Captivity 2 Ki. 24:1-4; Dan. 1:1-4
2. Jehoiachin The Second Captivity 2 Ki. 24:8-20
3. Zedekiah The Third Captivity 2 Ki. 25:1-30

Explanation

1. In the third year of Jehoiakim, Daniel and others of nobility among God's people were taken captive and carried away by Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty king of Babylon. Jehoiakim was left to reign for another eight years. He despised the Word of God (Jer. 36). Finally, Nebuchadnezzar came and bound Jehoiakim with chains of brass to carry him to Babylon (2 Chr. 36:6), but the king died and was buried with the burial of an ass, dragged along and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem (Jer. 22:19). At that time some of the vessels of the temple were taken and put in the temple at Babylon.

2. Upon Jehoiakim's death Jehoiachin reigned three months. Then Nebuchadnezzar returned to Jerusalem, encamped against it, and took it. Jehoiachin, most important people, and many treasures of the king's house and the temple were taken to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar made a covenant with Zedekiah whom he set up as king. In vain, Jeremiah, the prophet, once again called the people to repentance, but they ill-treated him. Yet, Jeremiah also comforted the people and announced their return after 70 years of captivity (Jer. 29:10-14). The joy of this salvation we find expressed in Psalm 126.

3. After nine years, Zedekiah rebelled and Nebuchadnezzar returned and reconquered Jerusalem after a siege of one and a half years. He put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and carried most of the people who were left to Babylon. He broke down the walls of Jerusalem and burned the houses and the temple. This final carrying away took place in the year 588 BC. (Ps. 137).

Lesson

God's longsuffering and patience did not bring about repentance. Things went from bad to worse (2 Chr. 36:14-16). Then was fulfilled, what Jehovah had spoken to Moses (Dt. 28:49-53). Though men despise God's Word, it will not become powerless, nor will it change.

Jeremiah feared God from his young years (Jer. 1:6). Therefore God could use him. Jeremiah felt and knew his weakness, but the Lord was always ready to give His help (Jer. 1:9). God asks faithfulness in witnessing (Jer. 1:17). Because Jeremiah believed God, he knew that God still had a future in store for his people (Jer. 32; 33; Rom. 11:29).

94. Daniel and His Three Friends. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream. — Daniel 1-2

Outline

1. Daniel and his Friends Dan. 1
2. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream Dan. 2:1-30
3. Daniel Interpreted the Dream Dan. 2:31-49

Explanation

1. The judgment on Israel and Judah was fulfilled as announced by God (Is. 39:5-7). Jehovah's throne was no longer in Jerusalem; world-dominion was transferred to a heathen ruler, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (the first world empire). A remnant of Israel was in captivity in Babylon. Yet, Daniel and his three friends remained faithful. God blessed them for this, and recompensed their faithfulness by giving them wisdom and granting them favour with their overseers.

2. God gave Nebuchadnezzar to dream but the king did not remember the dream. Trusting in Jehovah, Daniel and his companions prayed that God might reveal to them the dream and its interpretation (Jas. 1:5). God granted Daniel his request. Daniel then thanked God for answering his prayer (Dan. 2:23; Ps. 50:23).

3. The king had dreamed of an image representing prophetically four consecutive world empires. The image was ground to powder by a stone cut out without hands, which became a big mountain covering the whole earth.

The four world empires were:

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|----|----------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| 1. | The Babylonian | the head of Gold | (Nebuchadnezzar). |
| 2. | The Medo-Persian | the breast and arms of silver | (Cyrus). |
| 3. | The Greek-Macedonian | the belly and thighs of brass | (Alexander the Great, 333 B.C.). |
| 4a | The Roman | the legs of iron | During it, Christ came and was crucified. Though this empire doesn't exist today, it shall be revived (Rev. 13; 17 — The beast that was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go into destruction). |
| 4b | The revived Roman | the feet of iron and clay | The Antichrist will then sit in the temple in Jerusalem. |
| 5. | The Millennium | the stone cut out without hands | The Lord Jesus shall return, destroy these empires, and rule forever over the whole earth (Dan. 2:44). |

Lesson

The fruit of Daniel's faithfulness was that Nebuchadnezzar worshipped God. Note the contrast between the wise captive and the mighty ruler. Daniel remained humble and enjoyed God's blessings (Dan. 2:30; Prov. 15:33). Nebuchadnezzar became proud and received God's judgment.

From this time on, until the Lord's return, God deals only providentially with the earth. He, therefore, is no longer known as God of the earth, but as the God of the heavens.

To be cont'd

O Man of God! -- A Study in 1 Timothy 6

A. E. Bouter

Introduction

In order to understand what a "man of God" is in our day, we should study Paul's Epistles to Timothy, where we find these words twice (1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 3:17). The only other time we find this expression in the New Testament is in the plural, where it refers to the Old Testament prophets (2 Pet. 1:21). In the first reference, Paul writes to Timothy:

"But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and pursue righteousness, piety, faith, love, endurance, meekness of spirit" (1 Tim. 6:11).

The way Paul addresses Timothy with the words "O man of God," suggests an urgent and very personal appeal: urgent, because of the need of the hour; and personal, because of the individual responsibility to meet this need. The Greek word for "man" here is without distinction of sex. It should be the character of men and women who love the Lord Jesus and the truth of God. For our Lord was the true Man of God here on earth, and He still is it in heaven. In the midst of all failure on the part of God's people, our blessed Lord did everything for the pleasure of God: He came to do God's will (Heb. 10:9), and He accomplished the work the Father had given Him to do (Jn. 17:4). Through conflicts and opposition, being misunderstood, despised, rejected, mocked at, and blasphemed, our Lord continued faithfully to be a perfect Witness unto God of His rights here on the earth (1 Tim. 6:13).

Ten characteristics of being a man of God

In the last chapter of his Epistle to Timothy, Paul gives ten moral and spiritual qualities that are part of being *a man or woman of God*. We present them here for your careful meditation:

(1) First, notice how much attention Paul gives to the problem of money (1 Tim. 6:7-10, 17-19). In order to be a man of God, one surely has to flee from the "love of money" and all the things connected with that. This is a real test for most of us, who live in a society where so much is done because of the love of money. A Christian is also supposed to flee from fornication and idolatry (1 Cor. 6:18; 10:14), and from youthful lusts such as pride and arrogance (2 Tim. 2:22). Many believers are involved with things they should flee from; they fail to resist when they should.

(2) On the positive side, a man of God is attracted to Christ as He now is in heaven (Phil. 3:8-12), in order to follow Him down here as He was (Phil. 2:5-13). When we follow Him, we will also be able to follow diligently after the features which are necessary to be good witnesses and soldiers: "Fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. 6:12 — KJV).

(3) One result of this will be practical righteousness, as we see in our theme verse (1 Tim. 6:11). A man of God maintains God's rights, respects what is due to God both as Creator and Redeemer. This righteousness ("doing right") is based on the position God has given us in Christ (Rom. 8:1).

(4) Godliness or piety follows righteousness (1 Tim. 6:11). This means that a man of God walks in the fear of the Lord before God, realizing His presence in the minor details of his life. This attitude brings God into every part of his life and testimony. At the same time it brings him into line with the anointed Man of God. This is the moral effect of God's revelation to him (1 Tim. 3:16).

(5) Faith follows godliness. The man or woman of God sees things as God sees them, as the great faith chapter of the Bible, Hebrews 11, demonstrates. He is built up by God, puts his trust in God, and draws all his resources from Him.

(6) Love follows faith in this list, as it does in 1 Corinthians 13, "Faith, hope, and love." Since he has received a new nature, the man of God can respond to God's nature and be filled with love (Rom. 5:5). Then he has the capacity to show this love to believers, in marriage and family life, and to unbelievers.

(7) Patience or endurance follows, and this is the capacity to "keep the flesh under"; surely a difficult job! How much easier it is to try to defend ourselves, and maintain our rights. But what about God's rights? Aren't they important? They are maintained, practically, by showing this attitude of patience and endurance.

(8) The Lord Jesus is the perfect example of "meekness of spirit," our next quality in the list. He came as the true King to maintain God's rights, and was rejected.

(9) "Fight the good fight of faith," follows in the next verse. To be a witness for God is a constant battle for a man of God. This battle is not against flesh and blood, but against attacks of Satan. Doctrine may be involved in this battle. It is wrong to separate Christian living from Christian doctrine. These things are all linked up to the good confession Timothy had already made (1 Tim. 6:12).

(10) The list concludes with this challenge, "Lay hold of eternal life." This does not mean that Timothy did not receive eternal life the moment he believed; John 5:24 assures us that all believers have this. But Paul's desire for Timothy was that he should even now enjoy the things which God has prepared for us in Christ Jesus, who is the Eternal Life. A man of God is living for the things that belong to another world, to the new creation, where Christ is the Head and Center. He lays hold on these things and is practically enjoying them now. This enables him to render a faithful testimony in this world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that a man or woman of God is characterized by the following points. He uses God's resources which are always available for those with faith. Then he lives entirely for the pleasure of God, and represents God by being a living testimony of God's will. He is a vessel filled with the Spirit, who says, "God is all; I am nothing."

Another thing that characterizes him is that he is aware of the ruin of the public testimony of Christianity; it has largely lost its value before God in this world. Nevertheless, he doesn't become bitter or discouraged, but goes on to carry out God's will in his own life, family, and Christian fellowship. In this way, he has a good understanding of God's thoughts, His counsels with regard to the Church, the total depravity of man, God's sovereign grace, and the lost condition of the world.

A man of God is also a balanced person, "cutting in a straight line the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). He deviates neither to the right nor to the left. He doesn't overestimate some truths and underestimate others, but maintains the whole truth in its balance. This is true Christian maturity, sticking to the Scriptures in a correct and spiritual way, not in a legalistic, carnal, or selfish manner (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

It was Paul's burden not only to present the mystery of Christ to man, but also to present every man perfect or mature, full-grown, in Christ (Col. 1:28). How many problems occur among Christian people because of lack of maturity! Every Christian is encouraged in these Epistles to Timothy to follow the path of discipleship as a true man or woman of God. The answer to the general failure in Christianity today is to be found in individuals who would like to be overcomers in the challenges of every-day living. May God help us!

Questions And Answers (3)

Q8. What is the part to be played by women in Evangelism with regards to 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:8-12? Among the twelve apostles no woman was found.

A8. The Scriptures you refer to forbid women to speak in the churches, or assemblies (1 Cor. 14:34) and to "teach or exercise authority over man" (1 Tim. 2:12). The first reference clearly specifies the place, in the midst of the Christian Assembly. The second reference deals with public teaching by women whenever men are present. Although neither verse mentions evangelism as such, we nevertheless feel that obedience to 1 Timothy 2:12 would also prevent women from publicly preaching the gospel from the platform whenever men are present.

In Titus 2:3-4 we read, "That the elder women in like manner be in deportment as *becometh holiness* (the words in italics are KJV), not slanderers, not enslaved to much wine, teachers of what is right; that they may admonish the young women to be attached to their husbands, to be attached to their children." This does not refer to public teaching or preaching, but to instructing the younger women. Two verses imply that Timothy's mother and grandmother had been his childhood teachers in the Scriptures (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). We also know that Priscilla helped her husband, Aquila, to explain the way of God more exactly to the great preacher Apollos (Acts 18:26). In the Old Testament, the people who took the public place of teaching with Ezra, the scribe, from the podium were all men (Neh. 8:4).

As to evangelism in the New Testament, we find that the Lord has often caused the personal testimony given by women to be instrumental in the conversion or building up of others. Both John and Acts give such accounts. The Samaritan woman led many people to the Lord through her verbal testimony (Jn. 4:39). Lydia was most likely instrumental in the salvation of many in Philippi (Acts 16:14,40), and in the Epistle to the Philippians, Paul refers to Euodia and Syntyche, who "have contended along with me in the glad tidings" (4:3). On the practical side: two thirds of the evangelical missionaries in the last 150 years have been faithful women.

Q9. Are all Christian denominations capable of leading persons to God? (Mt. 7:21; Heb. 12:14)

A9. From Matthew 7:21 we learn that there are people who say that they serve God while they really don't. It was so in the days of the Pharisees, and it is still so today. For example, there are denominations that do not believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God. At best they regard the Bible as a book that teaches some good morals. However, I personally know of a young man who found the Lord through a Bible given him, along with some other books, by a cult. Of course, in principle a cult cannot lead us to God, but God can nevertheless use even a cult to do His work, but that is *in spite of* rather than *because of* the cult.

And so it is for many denominations. If they do not value God's Word, and do not acknowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ, God's eternal Son, died to pay the penalty for our sins, and that this brings salvation only to those who believe, they wear their Christian label falsely. But there are many denominations that do acknowledge these things. They may fail to recognize in one way or other all of God's truth, but that does not change the fact that they contain many true children of God. Because of this, they are able to lead others to Christ. Perhaps we cannot join a certain denomination because they do things contrary to God's Word. Though we would still recognize them as Christians, we ourselves have to follow the Lord as we are taught by His Word, and we must leave the judgment of our fellow Christians to the Lord. Here the pursuit of peace as well as holiness comes in (Heb. 12:14).

To be cont'd