

No Man Stood with Me

BY BROTHER GILBERT GROWCOTT

"God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind"—2 Timothy 1:7

PAUL'S 2nd letter to Timothy was written to strengthen and encourage him. Paul was a prisoner in Rome, about to be put to death. Timothy was labouring in the Truth at some distant place.

Paul appears to feel that Timothy was somewhat disheartened. Truly there was much to cause discouragement. Things were not going well with the Truth. They never have and never will. This is the day of small things--of trial and probation and darkness and faith.

In reading the epistles, we are impressed with how **personal and individual** a thing early Christianity was. It hung to a large extent on the shoulders of this one man and the few who were willing to give their lives to help him. Writing to the Philippians, he said—

"I trust in the Lord to send Timothy shortly unto you."

"I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state, for all seek their own—not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (2:19-20).

All were wrapped up in their own little lives and affairs, too busy to accept the honour and glory of a part in the most wonderful and history-making endeavour that the world has ever seen.

What is left of the things that seemed so important to them then?

But Timothy, though he early chose the one thing which was needful and held fast to it to the end, could get discouraged too. And though writing to encourage him, the external picture that Paul gives is not a happy one. In 1:15 he says:

"This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me."

And in chapter 4--

"Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (v. 10).

"At my first answer, no man stood with me, but all forsook me" (v. 16).

Timothy would wonder if there were any point in trying to maintain and hold together an organized body of believers--in trying to carry on ecclesial arrangements. Here was Paul, the very heart of the movement, a prisoner facing execution, and the body of so-called Christians he had gotten together were deserting him like rats from a sinking ship.

How pathetically he mentions Onesiphorus—one, at least, who sought him out in his imprisonment and was not ashamed of his chains.

What a state of affairs--when one brother stands out for grateful commendation for not having been ashamed of association with the apostle in his hour of trial.

But Paul relates these things without any bitterness or despair. He knows the purpose of God cannot fail--

"The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: The Lord knoweth them that are His."

—he says in ch. 2. Men may waver back and forth, but the foundation standeth sure; and all who will may stand upon it—be they many or few. Paul's concern was to keep the foundation before the eyes of men, regardless of the appearances or conditions in the external Christian body all around him.

"Stir up the gift of God which is in thee."

—he urges Timothy (1:6). We lose much of the comfort and unearthly marvelousness of the Gospel message if we relegate this exhortation to the past. *"Stir up the gift of God which is in thee,"* is just as

true today as ever—and what an awe-inspiring, unspeakable gift it is!

Paul continues (v. 7)—

"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

Power, and love, and a sound mind. This is the spirit that God gives us. **All the real power was on Paul's side**, though all appearances were to the contrary. And so he counsels with cheerful assurance, though forsaken and in prison and facing death. In the next chapter he says—

"I am in bonds, but THE WORD OF GOD IS NOT BOUND."

So he exhorts Timothy (1:8)—

"Be not thou ashamed, therefore, to testify to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but take your share of suffering for the Gospel according in the power of God."

"I am not ashamed," he says. He was not ashamed or afraid to meet scorn and ridicule and peril for the sake of the Truth. Why was he not, when others were? Was he **naturally** any different from them? No, his secret was—

"I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed."

He KNEW God. He did not just know **about** Him. He knew Him **personally**. Such knowledge does not come overnight. It takes time. The intimate companionship of God is not for every casual seeker. Solomon says (Eccl. 5:4)—

"When thou vowest a vow, defer not to pay it, for God hath no pleasure in fools."

This seems a "Hard saying," but it conveys an important principle of divine wisdom. To merit God's interest, we must be prepared to recognize and fulfil our obligations. This is an elementary requirement in any practical endeavour. We cannot be silly, illogical, inconsistent children all our lives.

Getting to know God must be taken seriously, and must be made the centre of life's purpose.

And we must be prepared to wait in patience, though the vision seem to tarry long. Can God be expected to open Himself to one whose heart is not firmly set on developing the acquaintance? *"God hath no pleasure in fools"*—those who are light or divided in their interests.

Paul knew Him, and therefore he could say—

'None of these things move me.'

Paul was not above human feelings. He had simply availed himself of something that was far mightier—the God-given spirit of *"power and of love and of a sound mind."* He said to the Corinthians that he was "perplexed, but not in despair." In the present darkness perplexity cannot be avoided. It is part of the training. But it need not, **must** not, lead to despair.

In v. 13 he exhorts Timothy—

"Hold fast the form of sound words."

This vital principle runs all through the epistle. In 2:15 it is—

"Study to show thyself approved with God—rightly dividing the Word of Truth."

But HOW? When we contemplate the endless multitude of theories developed on the supposed basis of the Word of God, especially in these last days of proliferating endeavours to break down and abandon the sound foundation laid by pioneer brethren, in order to pursue *"some new thing,"* we wonder how we should go about avoiding similar pitfalls. But actually it is not the problem that it may appear.

The Truth is simple. It is adjusted to our mental capacity. As long as we hold fast to its simple elements, we are safe.

And it has largely to do with our way of life. Jesus said—

"If any man will DO the will of God, he shall KNOW of the doctrine" (John 7:17).

Truly much of Scripture requires study, but there is plenty that is very clear and of practical bearing on our lives, and if we do **this** part, then—and ONLY then—will we know the other.

As guidance in this respect, Paul (in ch. 2) warns Timothy against 3 dangers (v. 14)—

"Strive not about words"

"Shun profane and vain babblings" (v. 16).

"Avoid foolish and unlearned questions" (v. 23).

One thing it will do us good to remember: it is much easier and more flesh-pleasing to dream and speculate than to study and learn. Imagination has tireless wings, but solid learning is slow, and plodding, and against the grain, especially scriptural learning. Let us briefly consider Paul's 3 points:

1. "Strive not about words."

Words are just tools. Much strife has been caused by attach different meanings to a word. Our contact with the mind of the Spirit is through the recorded words of Scripture, so let us study to get the true meaning of those words, and to use them properly.

Let us never think we know the meaning of a word until we have looked it up and have checked its use through Scripture. Words as they are commonly and locally used are often very inaccurate. The greatest pitfall is thinking we know, without making the effort to really find out.

The Word of God is the only true education there is, but it is not something we can peck at. To get anywhere we must, as Paul told Timothy, give ourselves "wholly to it."

"Strife about words"—harping over and over on a special little crotchet, is very hurtful and destructive ecclesially, even if the crotchet has a little basic merit: it is the weakness of small minds seeking easy self-gratification. Large and spiritual minds seek peace and harmony and BALANCED growth of knowledge on a BROAD front of study.

2. "Shun profane and vain babblings."

On the face of it, we thoughtlessly assume that never applies to us. But the real meaning is just empty, human talking—that is, the natural expressing of natural thought. The natural mind is foolish in God's sight.

Man can learn and observe facts, and modern man has made great strides in applying learned facts to modern inventions. In spiritual realms he must learn and stick to the facts—the revealed facts. He is lost if he begins to speculate on what is not revealed.

ALL speech that is not of grace, seasoned with spiritual salt, is *"profane and vain babbling."*

3. "Foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes."

There are many unanswered questions in the Bible, and they are often bandied profitlessly back and forth while the practical meat of divine teaching is overlooked.

The real teaching of Christ bears down hard on the flesh, so naturally the flesh prefers to turn its attention to side issues and crotchets which do not relate to the way of life.

But when we read the Scriptures, let us try to keep our attention on the heart of the flesh-mortifying teaching, and not allow it to deceitfully expend itself on the incidental scenery, for the heart of man is deceitful above all things.

Let us concentrate on the PRACTICAL aspects—the holiness, the service to God and to others, the self-denial, the kindness, the meekness, the purifications, the putting away of earthly treasures, the faith and fearless allegiance of Christ, the humble, lowly way of life.

"The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all" (2:24).

"Gentle unto ALL." How many pass **that** test of discipleship? Truly there is a necessary and commanded "striving," but the word used here means 'fight' or 'quarrel'; it is never scripturally used in a good sense.

If we can accomplish this basic attitude of gentleness toward ALL, then we have laid the groundwork for the gradual bringing unto perfection of the fruit of the Spirit.

But it must go deep. The natural, evil, irritable human tendency to quarrel must be completely dissolved away by the mind of the Spirit, not just side-tracked into other channels by being given a spiritual veneer as "*righteous anger*" or "*contending for the Faith*." The servant of the Lord **MUST NOT** strive, fight, or quarrel.

"In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance" (2:25).

If we can bring ourselves to realize that all is at all times in the unerring and almighty hand of God, and that we are but a small cog in a vast machine, we shall not be trapped into that self-important anxiety that leads to hastiness and harshness.

When we see worldliness and unclean, debasing worldly habits gaining ground in an ecclesia; when we see modern customs making a mockery of scriptural ordinances; when we see some drifting away into looser groups that have the appeal of numbers; when we see attendance gradually diminishing and worldly things interfering even on Sunday mornings; when we see bre. Thomas and Roberts and their works criticized and belittled and pushed aside, so that shallow and self-important little minds can introduce new crotchets and speculations—we are apt to become despondent and panicky.

BUT WHY SHOULD WE? Did Paul? No! He says (2:19)—

"The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: The Lord knoweth them that are His."

And the apostle, far from despondency, sounded out from his prison-cell inspiring words of courage, and patience, and glorious hope. Without bitterness, but with terrible significance, he points out (2:20) that in a great house there are not only vessels of honour, but also vessels of dishonour. If a man will purify himself, he shall be among the vessels of honour.

This may seem a strange way to give encouragement, but it would help Timothy to realize that ecclesial disappointments and difficulties do not necessarily mean an abandonment by God, but are rather a part of the divine wisdom of trial and probation.

If things were so in Paul's day, what are we to expect at the time of the end—the perilous times of the last days of which he speaks in the beginning of ch. 3? In the list of evils that will particularly mark the latter days, the 3 he puts first are instructive.

Surely, we can assume that the first ones he mentions are outstanding, either as the most serious, the most dangerous, or the most fundamental. They are "*Covetous, boasters, proud.*"

Surely, above all, these are days of covetousness and pride in this world's goods. And being human, we are all too easily drawn into this same vicious net unless we are consciously on guard. Covetousness is something that we always regard as applying to others. In ourselves we see it as just an intelligent appreciation of finer things and a commendable industriousness to acquire them.

Let us turn the searching beam of the Spirit on this foolishness. It was someone far wiser than we who said—

"Having food and raiment therewith be content."

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

"Verily they HAVE their reward."

Among the characteristics of the last days is (v. 5)—

*"Having a **form** of godliness, but denying the **POWER** thereof."*

"Denying the power thereof"—saying it "cannot be done." It is "not reasonable." What is "the

power thereof?" Let us consider a few verses in which this power is referred to—

"The exceeding greatness of His power to usward, according to the working of His mighty power" (Eph. 1:19).

"Now unto Him Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us."

"My brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10).

"Strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness" (Col. 1:11).

IS there such a thing as being *"strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness"*? Let us, at least, not be among those who *"deny the power thereof."*

There IS such a power, and making contact with it is the difference between life and death. It can and MUST be done!

"All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (3:12).

Persecution does not necessarily mean bodily peril. But the Scriptures lay down the principle that if we live faithfully and consistently according to the commands of Christ, we shall be treated in an unfriendly manner by the world in general.

It is not something we should invite, and quite often it is our fleshliness and discourtesy—rather than our Christlikeness—that creates the unpleasantness which we may be inclined to interpret as persecution for righteousness' sake. But still the fact remains that—

"All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

If we openly advocate and try to live up to the principles of Christ, we shall annoy most people because they do not want to live that way and resent the implication they should.

Until we recognize and completely accept this state of affairs, we shall be unhappy and divided in our minds. We can have no friendship with the world if we are an out-and-out, unconcealed follower of Christ.

They may tolerate us, but they cannot like us, for they will be uneasy in our presence, and we in theirs.

Everything that is not of the Father is of the world. Therefore, the world can also be among our own selves. There can be no true communion except between those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness--striving to get closer and closer to God and the divine way of life.

"Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and been assured of."

"From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation" (v. 15).

How are they able to make us *"wise unto salvation"*? Paul goes on to answer—

"All Scripture is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, for instruction in righteousness,

"That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly (that is, completely) furnished unto all good works."

This is a very common quotation among us, but have we ever stopped to analyze it and to note what the Scriptures are designed to do to us? —what it MEANS to be *"wise unto salvation"*?

*"Reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be **perfect and completely equipped.**"*

Do we realize the tremendous, vital power that lies between the covers of this Book? If we come to it hungering and thirsting after righteousness, ***we shall find it. It is a promise. It is a divine guarantee.***

It may be in a far different way than we expect, and there may be long waiting and darkness, but it **will** come—
a marvellous, divine, transforming power of godliness.

Our part is to hold fast, keep at it. On one occasion Daniel, the greatly beloved, mourned and fasted and prayed for 3 weeks continuously before receiving any recognition. Moses had to afflict himself 40 days before being received up to the mount of God. And these are but symbolic periods of waiting.

Anna, the prophetess, waited 84 years as a widow in the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer—waiting to see the salvation of the Lord.

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine" (4:3).

We know that the whole vast body of so-called Christendom has long since reached this state. They cannot bear to listen to sound teaching, for it interferes with their way of life. This is the biggest stumbling-block to accepting the Truth.

The lesson for us is to be sure that we are not among the number who are annoyed and resentful when the call to ever-increasing godliness and holiness is presented.

We DARE not regard it as a "*burden*"! That was wherein Israel grievously offended God. Can it be a "*burden*" that God asks us to draw closer and closer to Him and His way? Isn't this what we CLAIM to desire?

We must hunger and thirst after righteousness—we must perceive its divine beauty and value, and the repulsive, deathly ugliness of the natural fleshly mind.

"I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand" (v. 6).

Paul had come to the end of his course. Apart from the Master himself, no man had given more, or suffered more, for the Household of Faith.

One would expect that as the great apostle to the Gentiles went to his death for the Truth, the whole Brotherhood whom he had served so unselfishly would surround him in love and sorrow. But just the opposite was the case—

"All Asia (the very heart of his labours) is turned away from me" (1:15).

And when he stood before the stern Roman bar, his life at stake, he records—

"No one stood with me: all forsook me" (4:16).

Twice he implored Timothy in this last chapter—

"Do your best to come to me soon!"

The reason he gives is—

"For Demas (a long-time once-faithful companion) hath forsaken me, having loved this present world."

Demas was at one time a close fellow-labourer with Paul and joins with him in greetings in 2 former epistles. But apparently he had never truly grasped the real value and beauty of the Truth; had never had its divine transforming power sink into his heart.

The falling-away of the once-earnest Demas is the saddest part of the whole epistle. The sadness is that for Demas the picture had faded.

Why? Surely we would expect the vision of the future to grow brighter as one continued in the Truth. It does if we are ever striving to get nearer God.

But if we regard being in the Truth an end in itself—an accomplished thing that just requires

maintaining—then the vital, living reality of it will gradually, imperceptibly, fade from our minds. For we are so constituted. We get used to things—and their effect on us diminishes.

We cannot maintain an interest and an enthusiasm unless we are earnestly STRIVING for something. Paul said—

"Brethren, I count not myself yet to have laid hold, but one thing I do—

"Forgetting those things which are behind, and stretching forward to those things which are before,

"I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14).

He did not consider that he had attained. He could see that all the time that remained to him had to be accounted for by a continual movement toward the ideal in Christ. Not a mechanical approach—just a doing or not doing—but, as he says, that he might better apprehend, or **comprehend**: that is, a continuous mental drawing closer to the ideal. Let us note that this man says in the same Philippian epistle—

"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

"I have suffered the loss of ALL things, and do count them but DUNG that I may win Christ."

And again—

"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me!"

But **still** he could at the same time say—

"I have not attained. I have further to go. I stretch forward to the mark of the high calling."

That is the beauty and glory and power of the mark of the high calling in Christ Jesus—its unattainable but ever-inspiring perfection in godliness.

This was the secret that kept Paul's zeal on tiptoe—counting each moment an opportunity to improve his offering, to draw closer to God, to intensify the joy of divine fellowship—eagerly spending the time in loving preparation, always adding by anticipation to the pleasure the final perfect, endless communion. And when the time of his departure came, he said—

"I have fought a good fight."

It **was** a fight. It still IS a fight—a bitter yet glorious battle. A battle whose weapons are kindness, and patience, and gentleness, and endless self-searchings, and Hope in the darkness, and enduring, unquestioning Faith, and Love never-failing. But—

"He that OVERCOMETH shall inherit all things."
