

PAUL'S DYING WORDS.

– *DEC. 12.* – 2 TIM. 4:8,16-18. –

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course: I have kept the faith." – 2 Tim. 4:7.

PAUL wrote these his dying words to Timothy whom he dearly loved, and frequently refers to as his son. He was in prison in the city of Rome, and is supposed to have been sixty-three years of age at this time. His imprisonment in Rome referred to in a previous lesson, when he was permitted to live in "his own hired house," had terminated by his being released from custody; and it is supposed that during the period of his release, about three years, he revisited some of the Churches previously established and also carried the gospel into Spain.

It was during this interim of his freedom that the great persecution arose in Rome under Nero. That brutal Emperor is supposed to have caused the city of Rome to be set on fire that he might witness a great conflagration from the tower of his palace, or possibly with a view to having it rebuilt in a more modern style a monument to himself. But the losses occasioned by this fire, which could not be gotten under control for six days, and which laid a large portion of the city in ashes, stirred up so great a commotion amongst the people, so aroused their anger, that he thought it discreet to let the blame be laid at the door of Christianity; – the charge being that the Christians were the incendiaries and responsible for the great destruction wrought. Following out this line of policy, Nero began a terrible persecution of Christians, thus directing the suspicion of the people away from himself and against those who had taken the name of Christ: who were unpopular anyway with the wicked and the idolatrous. Multitudes were slain with the sword, exposed in the amphitheaters to be torn by wild beasts, or covered with the skins of wild beasts to be torn to pieces

by dogs, while some were wrapped in sheets covered with pitch and tied to stakes and set on fire as torches, to illuminate Nero's garden.

This persecution commenced shortly after Paul's release from his first imprisonment in Rome; and the spirit of bitter persecution thus aroused was still hot, when, three years later, he was again arrested. This time, as he explains in the words of this lesson (verses 16-18), it would appear that he had a public examination, possibly before Nero himself; but the fear of the people was so great, and quite probably the Apostle's language so bold, that he was forsaken of all, as was his Master when before Pilate. He tells us nevertheless, that he had with him the Lord's presence, which strengthened him to such an extent that he spoke the Word with a boldness which permitted the gospel to be fully known to the Gentiles thereabouts. He evidently was more anxious to make known the "good tidings" than to preserve himself from pain and death. He was a true and noble soldier of the cross – a close follower in the footsteps of our great Chief Captain, Christ Jesus. Paul's prison was a very uncomfortable place we may be sure. We visited the place which tradition points out in the city of Rome as being the place of his incarceration. It is a dungeon below the surface, dark, damp and extremely forbidding. But notwithstanding all this the reader must be struck with the tone of triumph which pervades the Apostle's writings from there. What else than the power of God could so sustain an able and cultured man under the various trials and vicissitudes through which he passed, including this his last imprisonment and his final execution, which followed shortly after the writing of this epistle to Timothy? He was spared from crucifixion by reason of being a Roman citizen, and instead he was beheaded, says tradition.

*

*

*

In the light of the foregoing circumstances, Paul's charge to Timothy is, so to speak, his dying message; and so regarded, its solemnity and impressiveness are increased before our minds. What

was this dying charge? It was that Timothy should be diligent, zealous in preaching the Word of God; that considerations of his own convenience should be entirely set aside and every opportunity for declaring the message of God's love in Christ availed.

As considerations moving to this end the Apostle mentions first the Father, God, – his approval; and second, the Lord Jesus Christ, the appointed Judge of all, living and dead, at his appearing and Kingdom. Only when moved by all of these considerations, can the preaching of the gospel be *most* effectual. He who does not believe in God the Father and in his Son, our Lord Jesus, could not preach the gospel at all; and even tho believing in the Father and the Son, no man can really preach the good tidings intelligently who does not believe also that the Son has been appointed by the Father to judge the world in the appointed Millennial day (Acts 17:31), and that this judgment of the world will be at (during) his manifestation and Kingdom, at his second advent.

The Apostle explains that, as a minister of the grace of God, this declaration of the gospel may include three features; (1) reproof, (2) rebuke, (3) exhortation. But it is safe to caution all of the Lord's people against a too liberal use of the first two features. In order to reprove properly, the heart should be very [R2229 : page 299] full of love and sympathy; else the reproofs and rebukes may be sharp, and possibly do more harm than good. Even with the heart full of love, it requires a head that is exceedingly well-balanced to be able to make use of reproofs and rebukes to good advantage to those who really need them. And herein God's people are to be wise as serpents, harmless as doves. Exhortation is the form of faithfulness which quite evidently can best be used by the majority of the Lord's people. And even it, as well as the other efforts, should be characterized by patience, longsuffering, brotherly-kindness.

Another point to be noticed is, that it is the Word of God that is to be preached, and not the word of man. However God may use

human instrumentalities in expounding his Word, the distinction between the Word of the Lord and the word of the expounder is to be continually recognized. Moreover, all this is to be done with "doctrine," better translated as in the Revised Version, "teaching." The Apostle links "teaching" with "long-suffering and patience," and gives us the thought that he who would be a successful servant of the Lord, really helpful to the Lord's flock, will be willing to dispense the message "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little," as a teacher; backing up the Word of the Lord with reason, and exemplification in his own life in connection with the exhortations, etc.

This message to Timothy, who was a public minister, would of course have special force and application to all who are endeavoring to feed "the flock over which the holy spirit hath made them overseers" (Acts 20:28); but it applies to all who are truly the Lord's, every one of whom is to be a preacher of righteousness, a servant of the truth, "holding forth the Word of life" to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

In this connection the Apostle prophesies, as in some other instances, and foretells a future day when sound teaching would not be endured by those avowing themselves to be followers of Christ. Prophetically, he points out the great falling away which culminated in the organization of Papacy. This reached a fulfilment very quickly after the death of the apostles. Teachers assumed to be a separate class and designated themselves "clergy," branding all others "laity." And this seemed to be more generally pleasing to the carnal mind than the divine arrangement. The people preferred that some one else should do their thinking and studying for them, rather than be merely their helpers or teachers, respecting the Word of the Lord. Thus darkness more and more dense came on the Church, resulting in the establishment of the great "abomination" noted in the Scriptures.* The minds of the people were turned away from the truth to fables, from the study of God's Word to the doing of penances and vain repetitions

of prayer; from faith in the precious blood of Christ, as the continual and only and ever acceptable sacrifice for sins, they turned to "the mass" and its fresh and oft repeated sacrifices for sins. Instead of walking by faith, the minds of the people were turned to fables respecting sacred relics and wonderful cures wrought by these; – nails from the cross, pieces of the cross, bones of saints, etc., etc. So completely were they turned to fables that for centuries the Word of God was wholly neglected; and that period is known in civil history as "the dark ages."

**See MILLENNIAL DAWN, [VOL. II., Chap. 9](#); [VOL. III., Chap. 4](#).*

Altho a Great Reformation set in and the Word of God reappeared amongst the people, and altho the preaching of it has brought great blessing and liberty to the people since, nevertheless the adversary still perverts the truth, and induces God's people to separate themselves, the one from the other, and thus to destroy the force and value of the Reformation and the influence of God's Word. Satan's present methods are suited to the occasion: he cannot prevent the circulation of the Scriptures, but he can blind with prejudice and superstition the minds of those who read, and see that what they read will profit them little: this is his present method of procedure. Under sectarianism he endeavors to offset the testimony of God's Word with the declarations of faith in the various creeds of Christendom.

The Apostle's words are as forceful as ever for all who would be ministers of the Word of God and not of the traditions of men; with all who would have their works stand in this day of fiery trial into which we are coming. To all such the Apostle's words to Timothy [**R2230 : page 299**] have a special appropriateness – "Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist [a teacher and expounder of the gospel and not of human tradition]."

How humble and yet how confident are the closing words of the great Apostle's testimony (verses 6-8), "I have fought a good fight," etc. He did not boast of perfection in his flesh, but on the contrary disclaimed it, saying, that he had constant need to keep his body "under," in subjection to the new mind. He did not boast of how many Churches he

had established, nor how many converts he had made and baptized. He did not boast of his knowledge of the Lord's Word, nor of his ability as a speaker, nor of how many epistles he had written, nor of his imprisonments and sufferings for the sake of the gospel. His boast, on the contrary, was simply that he had fought well, fought faithfully, fought the best he was able, against sin abounding on every hand and weaknesses in himself. His boast was not that he had made a faith, nor that he had expressed [R2230 : page 300] the gospel in the most clear and positive manner which would descend generations after him to glorify God and to bless his people; but his boast merely was that he had "kept the faith," the faith which God through his Word had inspired, the faith which he had received, and was given to all of the Lord's people; he had kept it, he had been faithful to it, he had not bartered it for a mess of pottage, earthly advantages.

On the strength of these two points, – his having kept the Word of the Lord's testimony obediently, and his having fought in defence of it to the end of his course, to the best of his ability – on the strength of these two things he builds his hope for the crown of rejoicing in the Kingdom with the Redeemer and his faithful, at his appearing.

What an encouragement is here for the very humblest of God's people; not by intellectual or physical strength, not by wonderful works, not by anything that we can do or have done for the Lord, his cause, and his people, are we to hope for eternal glory; but simply with the Apostle we are to seek to use what talents we do possess and what opportunities the Lord provides for us, faithfully. We are to keep the faith, not denying the faith under any consideration – not to secure the favor of any, nor to avoid the frowns of any, may we be unfaithful to the Word of God's testimony. We too, are to fight the good fight against selfishness in its every phase, especially in ourselves, and to develop in ourselves more and more under the Lord's instruction, his spirit, the spirit of love, the holy spirit.
