

Milk & Honey

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Spiritual Food and Encouragement for Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ

The Man of God

C. H. Macintosh

That the man of God may be perfect (complete), thoroughly furnished unto all good works. 2 Timothy 3:17

PART III: THE MAN OF GOD

Having considered the deeply interesting questions of “a man in nature” and “a man in Christ,” it remains for us now to consider, in this third and last part, the deeply practical subject of the title of this paper, namely, THE MAN OF GOD.

It would be a great mistake to suppose that every Christian is a man of God. Even in Paul’s day - in the days of Timothy, there were many who bore the Christian name who were very far indeed from acquitting themselves as men of God, that is, as those who were really God’s men, in the midst of the failure and error which, even then, had begun to creep in.

It is the perception of this fact that renders the Second Epistle to Timothy so profoundly interesting. In it we have what we may call ample provision for the man of God, in the day in which he is called to live - a dark, evil, and perilous day, most surely, in which all who will live godly must keep the eye steadily fixed on Christ Himself - His Name - His Person - His Word, if they would make any headway against the tide.

It is hardly possible to read Second Timothy without being struck with its intensely individual character. The very opening address is strikingly characteristic. “I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day .”

What glowing words are these! How affecting to harken thus to one man of God pouring the deep and tender feelings of his great, large, loving heart into the heart of another man of God! The dear apostle was beginning to feel the chilling influence that was fast creeping over the professing Church. He was tasting the bitterness of disappointed hopes. He found himself deserted by many who had once professed to be his friends and associates in that glorious work to which he had consecrated all the energies of his great soul. Many were becoming “ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, and of His prisoner .” It was not that they altogether ceased to be Christians, or abandoned the Christian profession; but they turned their backs upon Paul, and left him alone in the day of trial.

Now, it is under such circumstances that the heart turns, with peculiar tenderness, to individual faithfulness and affection. If one is surrounded, on all hands, by true hearted con-

fessors - by a great cloud of witnesses - a large army of good soldiers of Jesus Christ - if the tide of devotedness is flowing around one and bearing him on its bosom, he is not so dependent upon individual sympathy and fellowship.

But, on the other hand, when the general condition of things is low, when the majority prove faithless, when old associates are dropping off, it is then that personal grace and true affection are specially valued. The dark background of general declension throws individual devotedness into beautiful relief.

Thus it is in this exquisite Epistle which now lies open before us. It does the heart good to harken to the breathings of the aged prisoner of Jesus Christ, who can speak of serving God from his forefathers with pure conscience, and of unceasing remembrance of his beloved son and true yoke-fellow.

It is specially interesting to notice that both in reference to his own history and that of his beloved friend, Paul goes back to facts of very early date - facts in their own individual paths, facts prior to their meeting one another, and prior to what we may call their church associations - important and interesting as these things surely are in their place. Paul had served God, from his forefathers, with pure conscience, before he had known a fellow-Christian. This he could continue to do though deserted by all his Christian companions. So also, in the case of his faithful friend, he says, “I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that is in thee also .”

This is very touching and very beautiful. We cannot but be struck with such references to the previous history of those beloved men of God. The “pure conscience” of the one, and “the unfeigned faith” of the other, indicate two grand moral qualities which all must possess if they would prove true men of God in a dark and evil day. The former has its immediate references, in all things, to the one living and true God; the latter draws all its springs from Him. That, leads us to walk BEFORE God; this, enables us to walk WITH Him. Both together are indispensable in forming the character of the true man of God.

It is utterly impossible to over-estimate the importance of keeping a pure conscience before God, in all our ways. It is positively invaluable. It leads us to refer everything to God. It keeps us from being tossed hither and thither by every wave and current of human opinion. It imparts stability and consistency to the entire course and character. We are all in imminent

danger of falling under human influence - of shaping our way according to the thoughts of our fellow man, adopting his cue, or mounting his hobby.

All this is destructive of the character of the man of God. If you take your tone from your fellow, if you suffer yourself to be formed in a merely human mould, if your faith stands in the wisdom of man, if your object is to please men, then instead of being a man of God, you will become a member of a party or clique. You will lose that lovely freshness and originality so essential to the individual servant of Christ, and become marked by the peculiar and dominant features of a sect.

Let us carefully guard against this. It has ruined many a valuable servant. Many who might have proved really useful workmen in the vineyard, have failed completely through not maintaining the integrity of their individual character and path. They began with God. They started on their course in the exercise of a pure conscience, and in the pursuit of that path which a divine hand had marked out for them. There was a bloom, a freshness, and a verdure about them, most refreshing to all who came in contact with them. They were taught of God. They drew near to the eternal fountain of Holy Scripture and drank for themselves. Perhaps they did not know much; but what they did know was real because they received it from God, and it turned to good account for "there is much food in the tillage of the poor."

But, instead of going on with God, they allowed themselves to get under human influence; they got truth secondhand, and became the vendors of other men's thoughts. Instead of drinking at the fountain head, they drank at the streams of human opinion; they lost originality, simplicity, freshness, and power, and became mere copyists, if not miserable caricatures. Instead of giving forth those "rivers of living water" which flow from the true believer in Jesus, they dropped into the barren technicalities and cut and dry common-places of mere systematized religion.

All this must be sedulously guarded against. We must watch against it, pray against it, believe against it, and live against it. Let us seek to serve God, with a pure conscience. Let us live in His own immediate presence, in the light of His blessed countenance, in the holy intimacy of personal communion with Him, through the power of the Holy Spirit. This, we may rest assured, is the true secret of power for the man of God, at all times, and under all circumstances. We must walk with God, in the deep and cherished sense of our own personal responsibility to Him. This is what we understand by "a pure conscience."

But will this tend, in the smallest degree, to lessen our sense of the value of true fellowship, of holy communion with all those who are true to Christ? By no means; indeed it is the very thing which will impart power, energy, and depth of tone to the fellowship. If every "man in Christ" were only acquitting himself thoroughly as "a man of God," what blessed fellowship there would be! what heart work! what glow and unmistakable power! How different from the dull formalism of a merely

nominal assent to certain accredited dogmas of a party, on the one hand, and from the mere esprit de corps of cliquism, on the other.

There are few terms in such common use and so little understood as "fellowship." In numberless cases, it merely indicates the fact of a nominal membership in some religious denomination - a fact which furnishes no guarantee whatsoever of living communion with Christ, or personal devotedness to His cause. If all who are nominally "in fellowship" were acquitting themselves thoroughly as men of God, what a very different condition of things we should be privileged to witness!

But what is fellowship? It is, in its very highest expression, having one common object with God, and taking part in the same portion; and that object, that portion, is Christ - Christ known and enjoyed through the Holy Spirit. This is fellowship with God. What a privilege! What a dignity! What unspeakable blessedness! To be allowed to have a common object and a common portion with God Himself! To delight in the One in whom He delights! There can be nothing higher, nothing better, nothing more precious than this. Not even in Heaven itself shall we know aught beyond this. Our own condition will, thank God, be vastly different. We shall be done with a body of sin and death, and be clothed with a body of glory. We shall be done with a sinful, sorrowful, distracting world, where all is directly opposed to God and to us, and we shall breathe the pure, invigorating atmosphere of that bright and blessed world above.

For, in so far as our fellowship is real, its now, as it shall be then, "with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" - "in the light," and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thus much as to our fellowship with God. And, as regards our fellowship one with another, it is simply as we walk in the light; as we read, "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). We can only have fellowship one with another as we walk in the immediate presence of God. There may be a vast amount of mere intercourse without one particle of divine fellowship. Alas! a great deal of what passes for Christian fellowship is nothing more than the merest religious gossip - the vapid, worthless, soul-withering chitchat of the religious world, than which nothing can be more miserably unprofitable. True Christian fellowship can only be enjoyed in the light. It is when we are individually walking with God, in the power of personal communion, that we really have fellowship one with another, and this fellowship consists in real heart enjoyment of Christ as our one object, our common portion. It is not heartless traffic in certain favorite doctrines which we receive to hold in common. It is not morbid sympathy with those who think, and see, and feel with us in some favorite theory or dogma. It is something quite different from all this. It is delighting in Christ, in common with all those who are walking in the light. It is attachment to Him, to His person, His name, His Word, His cause, His people. It is joint consecration of heart and soul to that blessed One who

loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and brought us into the light of God's presence, there to walk with Him and with one another. This, and nothing less, is Christian fellowship; and where this is really understood it will lead us to pause and consider what we say when we declare, in any given case, "such an one is in fellowship."

But we must proceed with our Epistle, and there see what full provision there is for the man of God, however dark the day may be in which his lot is cast.

We have seen something of the importance - yea, rather, we should say the indispensable necessity of "a pure conscience," and "unfeigned faith," in the moral equipment of God's man. These qualities lie at the very base of the entire edifice of practical godliness which must ever characterize the genuine man of God.

But there is more than this. The edifice must be erected as well as the foundation laid. The man of God has to work on amid all sorts of difficulties, trials, sorrows, disappointments, obstacles, questions and controversies. He has his niche to fill, his path to tread, his work to do. Come what may, he must serve. The enemy may oppose; the world may frown; the Church may be in ruins around him; false brethren may thwart, hinder, and desert; strife, controversy, and division may arise and darken the atmosphere; still the man of God must move on, regardless of all these things, working, serving, testifying, according to the sphere in which the hand of God has placed him, and according to the gift bestowed upon him. How is this to be done? Not only by keeping a pure conscience and the exercise of an unfeigned faith - priceless, indispensable qualities! but, further, he has to harken to the following weighty word of exhortation - "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands."

The gift must be stirred up, else it may become useless if allowed to lie dormant. There is great danger of letting the gift drop into disuse through the discouraging influence of surrounding circumstances. A gift unused will soon become useless; whereas, a gift stirred up and diligently used grows and expands. It is not enough to possess a gift, we must wait upon the gift, cultivate it, and exercise it. This is the way to improve it.

And observe the special force of the expression, "the gift of God." In Ephesians 4 we read of "the gift of Christ," and there, too, we find all the gifts, from the highest to the lowest range, flowing down from Christ the risen and glorified Head of His body, the Church. But in Second Timothy, we have it defined as "the gift of God." True it is - blessed be His holy name! - our Lord Christ is God over all, blessed forever, so that the gift of Christ is the gift of God. But we may rest assured there is never any distinction in Scripture without a difference; and hence there is some good reason for the expression "gift of God." We doubt not it is in full harmony with the nature and object of the Epistle in which it occurs. It is "the gift of God" communicated to "the man of God" to be used by him

notwithstanding the hopeless ruin of the professing church, and spite of all the difficulty, darkness, and discouragement of the day in which his lot is cast.

The man of God must not allow himself to be hindered in the diligent cultivation and exercise of his gift, though everything seems to look dark and forbidding, for "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power and of love, and of a sound mind." Here we have "God" again introduced to our thoughts, and that, too, in a most gracious manner, as furnishing His man with the very thing he needs to meet the special exigency of his day - "The spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

Marvelous combination! Truly, an exquisite compound after the art of the apothecary! Power, love, and wisdom! How perfect! Not a single ingredient too much. Not one too little. If it were merely a spirit of power, it might lead one to carry things with a high hand. Were it merely a spirit of love, it might lead one to sacrifice truth for peace' sake; or indolently to tolerate error and evil, rather than give offence. But the power is softened by the love; and the love is strengthened by the power; and, moreover, the spirit of wisdom comes in to adjust both the power and the love. In a word, it is a divinely perfect and beautiful provision for the man of God - the very thing he needs for "the last days" so perilous, so difficult, so full of all sorts of perplexing questions and apparent contradictions. If one were to be asked what he would consider most necessary for such days as these, surely he should, at once, say, "power, love, and soundness of mind." Well, blessed be God, these are the very things which He has graciously given to form the character, shape the way, and govern the conduct of the man of God, right on to the end.

But there is further provision and further exhortation for the man of God. "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner; but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God." In pentecostal days, when the rich and mighty tide of divine grace was flowing in, and bearing thousands of ransomed souls upon its bosom; when all were of one heart and one mind; when those outside were overawed by the extraordinary manifestations of divine power, it was rather a question of partaking of the triumphs of the gospel, than its afflictions. But in the days contemplated in Second Timothy, all is changed. The beloved apostle is a lonely prisoner at Rome; all in Asia had forsaken him; Hymeneus and Philetus are denying the resurrection; all sorts of heresies, errors, and evils are creeping in; the landmarks are in danger of being swept away by the tide of apostasy and corruption.

In the face of all this, the man of God has to brace himself up for the occasion. He has to endure hardness; to hold fast the form of sound words; he has to keep the good thing committed to him; to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; to keep himself disentangled - however he may be engaged; he must keep himself free as a soldier; he must cling to God's

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Continued from page 3 – *The Man of God*

sure foundation; he must purge himself from the dishonorable vessels in the great house; he must flee youthful lusts, and follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. He must avoid foolish and unlearned questions. He must turn away from formal and heartless professors. He must be thoroughly furnished for all good works, perfectly equipped through a knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. He must preach the Word; be instant in season and out of season. He must watch in all things; endure afflictions; and do the work of an evangelist.

What a category for the man of God! Who is sufficient for these things? Where is the spiritual power to be had for such works? It is to be had at the mercy seat. It is to be found in earnest, patient, believing, waiting upon the living God, and in no other way. All our springs are in Him. We have only to draw upon Him. He is sufficient for the darkest day. Difficulties are nothing to Him, and they are bread for faith. Yes, difficulties of the most formidable nature are simply bread for faith, and the man of faith will develop and grow strong thereby. Unbelief says, "There is a lion in the way"; but faith slays the lion that roars along the path of the nazarite of God. It is the privilege of the true believer to rise above all the hostile influences which surround him, no matter what they are, or from whence they spring; and, in the calmness and brightness of the divine presence, enjoy as high communion, and taste as rich and rare privileges as ever were known in the Church's brightest days.

Let us remember this - every man of God needs to remember it; there is no comfort, no peace, no strength, no moral power, no true elevation to be derived from looking at the ruins. We must look up out of the ruins to the place where our Lord Christ has taken His seat, at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. Or rather, to speak more according to our true position, we should look down from our place in the heavens upon

all the ruins of earth. To realize our place in Christ, and to be occupied in heart and soul with Him, is the true secret of power to carry ourselves as men of God. To have Christ ever before us - His work for the conscience, His person for the heart, His Word for the path, is the one grand, sovereign, divine remedy for a ruined self, a ruined world, a ruined Church.

But we close. Very gladly would we linger over the contents of this most precious Second Timothy. Truly refreshing would it be to dwell upon all its touching allusions, its earnest appeals, its weighty exhortations. But this would demand a volume, and hence we must leave the Christian reader to study the Epistle for himself, praying that the eternal Spirit who indited it may unfold and apply it in living power to his soul, so that he may be enabled to acquit himself as an earnest, faithful, wholehearted man of God and servant of Christ, in the midst of a scene of hollow profession, and heartless worldly religiousness.

May the good Lord stir us all up to a more thorough consecration of ourselves, in spirit, soul, and body - all we are and all we have - to His service! We think we can really say we long for this - long for it, in the deep sense of our lack of it - long for it, more intensely, as we grow increasingly sick of the unreal condition of things within and around us.

Let us earnestly, believingly, and perseveringly cry to our own ever gracious God to make us more real, more wholehearted, more thoroughly devoted to our Lord Jesus Christ in all things. *

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