

TO MY SON

An Expositional Study of II Timothy

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CHAPTER TEN -

MEET THREE GROUPS!

II Timothy 2:22-26

22 Flee also youthful lusts : but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

23 But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.

24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,

25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

FIRST, the "**them**" of verse 22; then, the "**those**" of verse 25 : and the "**they**" of verse 26. All Christian workers are likely to meet them. Timothy certainly will, in his special position of authority and leadership. What shall be his, and our, attitude and behaviour toward them? We begin with

THE DELIGHTFUL COMPANY OF THE REAL

"Them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (verse 22).

False teachers, such as those he referred to earlier in the chapter, and those who followed them, would "**call**" on Him, but not "**out of a pure heart.**" These here, on the other hand, are sincere believers. I expect they were not perfect: they probably had their failings, as they would, in all likelihood, be ready painfully to acknowledge; but GOD, Who reads hearts, knew that, in spite of failures, they were truly sincere. Do you recall that poignant Resurrection scene by the lakeside, when, to match his threefold sleep and his threefold denial, Peter is given the threefold challenge, and how, in answer to the searching examination, the disciple answers, "**Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee**"? John 21:17.

In spite of my dreadful fall, Thou knowest that I do love Thee! Nobody else would know it, seeing I have treated Thee so shamefully, but Thou knowest! Yes, he was real; and so are these of whom the apostle here speaks. We might pause a moment and search our hearts, to see if we

have any place in this delightful company.

Now, how is Timothy to conduct himself in relation to them? Two things, it appears, are to characterise his behaviour: the One, negative, "**Flee**"; and the other, positive, "**Follow**."

He is to

(a) "**Flee youthful lusts**." Mark that word

(i) "**youthful**." Timothy is very young for his post, he is only about thirty-six years old: full young for the responsibilities resting upon his shoulders, and for the leadership that will be expected of him. He will be very much the junior of those "**elders**" of Ephesus over whom he is to preside. He will have to be very tactful in his approach and in his attitude, if he is to be the success, and the blessing, that he will long to be. Those older Christians may, at times, be not too easy, for Paul, even a year ago, in 1 Timothy 4:12, had thought it necessary to warn the young bishop, "**Let no man despise thy youth**."

(ii) "**Lusts**" - is not to be restricted to the special meaning that the word bears for us.

Sometimes, as in 1 Peter 2:II, it is "**fleshly lusts**" that are in mind; but the New Testament uses the word in a wider sense, for any strong desire, or longing, or tendency. The natural proclivities of youth are likely to be of especial danger, even in Christian work, when a young man is set in authority over his elders.

The youthful tendency of always wanting one's own way - when the situation may sometimes be best dealt with by giving way. The youthful tendency to desire to be always in evidence - when often the best work is done, even in a leader, in the background, and when it is the worst policy (to put it no higher) to push oneself forward. The youthful tendency to be overfond of novelty in teaching - taking up the latest movement of thought, without weighing it overmuch.

The youthful tendency to be blind to the other man's point of view - as if there never could be any other reasonable, or respectable, side than that which one has oneself espoused. The youthful tendency to be in too much of a hurry - having no patience to work quietly for the desired end, an end that must be, and that must be now, or sooner! Let me hasten to add that these things are not, by any means, the exclusive propensities of youth. Older folk are, in some cases, just as liable to exhibit such weaknesses; but I think it will be admitted that they are the peculiar property of youth at large - with delightful exceptions. Well, what havoc they might cause in Christian service. So young Timothy is bidden to

(iii) "**Flee**" them. But, on second thoughts, is the Christian ever to flee? "**Resist the devil, and he will flee from you**," says James 4:7; he will do the fleeing. Surely, the Christian should never turn his back on the enemy? Isn't that why, in "**the whole armour of GOD**," in Ephesians 6:13-18, there is no protection for the back?

No, I'm afraid we must give up that notion; for the Roman soldier's "breastplate" was a contraption that covered his whole body, back and front. The truth is that there are times when the only safe, and right, thing to do is to flee. Such is the advice here: that we shall put the

greatest possible distance between ourselves and these things which might so easily spoil our influence, and ruin our service. Timothy must be on his guard, and on the run. Otherwise, he could so quickly jeopardise his ministry.

But all this is negative. On the positive side, he is to

(b) "**Follow**." Not on his own account merely, but "**with them**": he and they adopting this procedure mutually. What, then, shall Timothy be careful to pursue, and encourage them to pursue along with him?

(i) "**Righteousness**" - that is, right dealing. Do you think we Christians are always as careful to practise this amongst our fellows? Whence comes all this criticising of one another, all this cutting of one another? Don't we sometimes behave in an extraordinary and shocking way to brother Christians?

(ii) "**Faith**" - that is, here, faithfulness, fidelity. Do people feel that we are always to be relied upon, to keep our word, to do our duty, to do a good turn? Can GOD trust us?

(iii) "**Charity**" - that is, of course, love, without which all else is cold and hard. It is possible to be absolutely correct, if I may say so, dreadfully correct - as correct as a poker, and as cold and hard: what that poker needs is the fire. And what some very orthodox people need is the same thing, fire the fire of love - to make all their righteousness and faithfulness glow with warmth. Then

(iv) "**Peace**" - that is, no friction, untroubled fellowship, no grit in the machinery to spoil its smooth running and its working efficiency. Sometimes, alas, there is friction in the fellowship-between leader and members, between member and member.

Sometimes a member complains that another is against him; sometimes it is more widespread, and he says that everybody is against him. In this latter case, the member had better enquire of himself whether it is he that is wrong. It may not be so; but it just may be. Like the fond mother who stood on the pavement watching a company of soldiers go by. They were a fine lot of men, and marching well. The good lady's son was among them. Presently it dawned on her that something was wrong; and turning to a neighbour, she said, "Look, my Tom is the only one in step"! Well, it may be that you are the one that is wrong. If, honestly, you find it is so, then change step, get right, get in tune with the others, so that there may be nothing to mar the untroubled fellowship. "**Ye should follow His steps,**" I Peter 2:21.

Timothy will find this delightful company a great refreshment to him, and a great power in the work. And if, by his fleeing and following, he can avoid injuring the fellowship, he will judge it to be infinitely worth while, whatever may be the cost to himself.

If he is wise, he will spare no pains in the matter, and he will be rewarded by discovering that these negative and positive qualities have combined to win for him the esteem and affection that elders are not normally too ready to give to a youthful leader. And now we come to

THE DIFFICULT COMPANY OF THE REBELLIOUS

"**Those that oppose themselves**" (verse 25). We shall be bound to meet, sooner or later, with opposition. Sometimes it will come from without the church. I do not think we need be unduly alarmed at that; perhaps we should be rather disturbed if there is no opposition from that quarter. This might mean - might - that there is no real "bite" in our message, not sufficient "drive" in our work to cause any concern to the enemy. I think, however, that Paul is dealing here with the opposition that may arise within the church, which is always the more difficult to tackle. He is seeking to prepare his "son" to meet it, in whatever form it may arise, and from whatever direction it may come. What, then, will be the wise course to pursue in the face of opposition - whether, as a matter of fact, it arise either within or without?

First of all, he had better

(a) Decline their disputes.

(i) "**Foolish and unlearned questions avoid**" - that word "**unlearned**" is interesting, it means undisciplined. It is the word one would use to designate what we know as an undisciplined child. How difficult such a little person is, how uncomfortable, how unattractive, how unseemly. Well, there are such things as undisciplined questions, that ought never to be put or discussed - prying into hidden matters, probing into things that GOD has not seen fit to reveal to us, playing with spirits. "**Profane and vain babblings**," he has called them, in verse 16.

(ii) "**They do gender strifes**" and they certainly gender nothing else. Talk and argument can become a very subtle danger. I don't believe it ever gets you anywhere, spiritually; and it so often ministers to bickering and temper - heat, without light.

You can triumphantly win an argument, and yet be quite wrong; you can be somewhat brow-beaten, and crestfallen, through being beaten in argument, when all the while you were quite right. Success in argument may depend, not at all on accuracy of knowledge, but merely on nimbleness of wit and glibness of tongue. Much better "**avoid**" it - especially if it be concerned with undisciplined questions.

(iii) "**The servant of the Lord must not strive**" - there are occasions when he is bound, as Jude 3 tells us, to "**earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints**"; but I do not imagine that our writer had that sort of thing in mind at this point.

Dr. C. H. Irwin, in his *Universal Commentary*, had a rendering of this which seems to meet the case rather neatly - he has "The servant of the Lord must not be quarrelsome in the way in which he maintains the truth." The quarrelsome partisan can be little help to the cause, and is liable to be a great stumbling block to those that oppose themselves. On the other hand, these opposers can themselves be very quarrelsome folk.

Wanting to argue, not to learn the truth, but only to "get at you", only for argument's sake - like the Irishman who is said to trail his coat for you to trample on, only because he loves a scrap! The answer to all that is, Decline - or, in Paul's word, "**avoid**" any such embroilment.

However, we must

(b) Deal with their difficulties.

(i) And to that end, Timothy, like ourselves, is to be "**apt to teach.**" Paul has said the same thing, in I Timothy 3:2, when discussing the qualities necessary to bishops in general; and now he repeats it for the benefit of his young friend in particular. It is one word in the Greek, and the late Bishop Handley Moule has a delightful translation of it - he says he is to be "explanatory."

I wonder if we are all explanatory Christians? Are we by word of mouth, as opportunity occurs, and by example of life, explaining to people, even to opposers, the Christian message, the Christian gospel, the Christian way, the Christian life - showing them the truth? It is vastly better to explain than to argue.

And

(ii) Don't forget that he is to be "**in meekness instructing.**" There is to be a humble selflessness about it. His aim is to be not to score, but to save. You will remember that when our Lord said, in Matthew 11:29, "**I am meek and lowly in heart**", it was in connection with His teaching ministry, "**Learn of Me.**"

It is all too possible even for Christian teachers to be self-assertive, self-opinionated, and self-seeking. And if, as in Timothy's case, it is the younger who is to instruct the older, there is all the greater need for meekness - otherwise, the pupils may so readily take umbrage, and the truth so easily lose caste. We are to seek to help the opposers in their difficulties, but we must be careful to do it in the right spirit.

So we are to

(c) Display real sympathy.

After all, why are they in the position of opposers? Were they always such; or is there some sad history behind their present attitude? If we knew all, we might be inclined to cease being restive, and annoyed, with them; we might become even eager, not to snub nor to beat them, but to help and to save them.

You would sometimes find that this antagonism arises out of a lack of opportunity; they have never had the chance of hearing, still less of understanding, the Christian way; they pick up spurious criticisms in the workshop or office, they swallow it all, and they repeat it parrot-wise. Brought up in almost "heathen" surroundings at home, they simply don't know. Don't get angry with them, get anxious for them, and try, with all the sympathy you can muster, to be "explanatory."

Or, maybe their inimical spirit has grown out of some hard and bitter experience of life. Loss, pain, bereavement, failure came, and they blamed GOD. They have got it all wrong, of course; but do try to let them see that you do care. Sometimes your sympathy will melt their poor cold heart, break up the hard soil, and give you the chance to sow your seed.

Again, their hostile attitude may have been born out of the evil effect of a professing Christian's inconsistency. I wonder if we Christians realise how much harm can be done by a careless walk, and how many have been "put off" by our unworthy behaviour. I know it is very foolish of them to judge all Christians by the standard of bad ones - as if they would thereafter reject all half-crowns if one day they discovered a bad one; but, foolish or not, the fact is they do it.

In case your opposer was stumbled by such a bad specimen, take great pains to show him, in your own person, what a really good one is like. Above all, don't be impatient with him, he needs your utmost sympathy.

Then, there are those whose animosity is really the fruit of moral defeat. If you could track it down to its source, you would discover that that is the trouble.

To quieten their accusing conscience they have reared up this barrier of opposition around themselves - they can only feel secure by pretending that it doesn't matter, and that they don't care, and that anyhow they don't believe in that old-fashioned nonsense any longer. No, don't be cross with them; you will never win them back that way, your superiority will only drive them further still.

So the apostle gives us two words to guide us in our contacts with these difficult people.

(i) "**Gentle.**" The Psalmist says once (18:35), "**Thy gentleness hath made me great.**" What amazed him was that, although, by reason of his sin, He might have dealt with him in great anger, He was actually so gentle with him. An exercise of His power would, indeed, have impressed him; but the exhibition of His gentleness just astonished him. Anything that he had subsequently done, anything that he had come to be, ran back to that, as its source and secret.

If only we would try this quiet quality, we should be surprised how much it does accomplish. So often it has happened, after the pattern of 1 Kings 19:11-12, that the Lord, Who was not in the wind, the earthquake, and the fire, has manifested Himself in the "**still, small voice.**"

Then, in our sympathetic way, let us be gentle with these rather awkward opposers, remembering always that "**gentleness,**" according to Galatians 5:22 is part of "**the fruit of the Spirit.**"

(ii) "**Patient**" The word used means "*patient with ill.*" It is a medical term. Professor David Smith says it signified a "sufferer who bore his malady bravely and uncomplainingly." Those upsets and irritations caused by these opposers are as unpleasant symptoms which Timothy is to bear with patience, even to treat with humour. They will not fail to be impressed by such a God-controlled response to what they have had to suffer.

(iii) "**GOD will give them repentance**" - yes, that is the whole desire and longing of the believer; no matter what the inconvenience, what the trouble, what the suffering, if only these souls can be reached for GOD. Acts 5:31 tells us that the Lord JESUS CHRIST was exalted Prince and Saviour to give repentance . . . and forgiveness"; Acts 11:18 explains that "**God . . . granted repentance unto life**"; while Romans 2:4 reminds us that "**the goodness of God leadeth . . . to repentance.**" May it be our privilege so to show them this crucified and exalted CHRIST, so to reflect to them this goodness of GOD, that they may be brought, through real

repentance, to forgiveness and to life.

(iv) **"To the acknowledging of the truth"** - the repentance must come first, and then this further blessing, which, if we may so translate the word, really implies "the accurate knowledge of the truth."

They have never had any knowledge of the truth, or else they have lost what knowledge they had once enjoyed; but now, whether blind from birth, or blind from accident, each can say, **"Whereas I was blind, now I see,"** John 9:25; or, in the eye-opening experience of another, **"Behold, I thought . . . behold, now I know"**, II Kings 5:11, 15.

So is the sad, and perhaps obstinate, opposition overcome. How seemingly implacable was the bitter enmity to CHRIST of this very man who now writes to counsel young Timothy on the best method of dealing with opponents. Then, such utter repentance, root and branch, was granted him by the Exalted Prince and Saviour on the Damascus road, that, as he reveals to us in Galatians 1:23, the churches heard **"that he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed"!**

Well, such repentance will automatically remove all erstwhile opposers out of this difficult company into the third group that this passage speaks of, the people of the last verse of our present portion

THE DESIRABLE COMPANY OF THE RESTORED

"They that recover themselves out of the snare of the devil" (verse 26). Two blessed experiences are said to have been theirs, the one negative, the other positive. How often Paul presents truth to us from that twofold aspect.

(a) They "are Escaped from the devil."

(i) **"Out of the snare of the devil,"** he says. How many are all unconsciously ensnared in that trap: they would be greatly surprised, and highly incensed, if they were told they were told they were, and it is only when they try to escape that they become really aware of their imprisonment. How cleverly the devil lures us, working with, and working upon, the thing that fascinates us.

Mice don't like traps; but they do like cheese - and there lies the tragedy. There is a passage (James 1:14), where we are given what one might call the physiology of temptation - **"every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."**

That is the way Satan lures us, draws us away: he plays upon our lust, our particular strong leaning or liking - that's the cheese! So he gets us. How did these people of Timothy's get into that undesirable situation? Why, they were just bemused.

(ii) **"That they may recover themselves"**, says our verse; and the word gives us our clue. It means, *"to be restored to soberness."* The late Dean Alford puts it this way, "These people have, in a state of intoxication, been entrapped; and are enabled, at their awaking sober, to escape." So they recover themselves.

One is reminded of the prodigal, in Luke 15:17, who "**came to himself.**" He had not been himself for a long time. Benjamin Disraeli once said of W. E. Gladstone that he was "intoxicated with the exuberance of his own verbosity"; well, that prodigal, it seems, was intoxicated with the exuberance of his own conviviality - he had completely lost himself. But "**when he came to himself**" - he saw his utter folly, and found his way back home again. So he recovered himself; and so these parishioners of Ephesus.

These prisoners of Satan, shall be restored - for we turn now from the negative to the positive.

On that side of this desirable picture we observe that

(b) *They are embraced by the Lord.* We come here to what is a most difficult problem for the expositor, and I must try my rather unskilled hand upon it. The last phrase of the chapter reads "**who are taken captive by him at his will.**"

Who is this "**him**" this "**his**"? Following the A.V., I have refrained from the use of capital letters until we have seen our way to the possible identification of the person, or persons. They are, as a matter of fact, two different words in the Greek; and a no less redoubtable authority than the late Dr. Samuel Green, in his *Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek Testament*, p. 282, says, "The two pronouns can hardly refer to the same subject."

He himself believes in company with many other commentators, that the first refer to Satan and the second to GOD. Conversely, there is another school, who hold that the first word refers right back to "**the servant of the Lord**", in verse 24. while the second belongs to GOD.

Only a very few consider that both words point to the devil. Now, two considerations give me pause before coming down off the fence. One Dr. Green's own word "hardly", in which I think I detect the tone of a voice that is not absolutely certain - almost so, but not quite; though hardly likely, it is just possible there may be another view of the matter. Then, the late learned Dr. A. T. Robertson in that massive *Grammar of the Greek New Testament* of his, pages 706 f., in discussing the use and force of the second of our two words, points out its frequent employment in a repetitive emphatic sense, taking up the former word and stressing it.

This is not always the case: we shall presently come across an instance (in 3:9) where the same two words are used as quite obviously referring to two different people; but this does not affect the other use which we have mentioned above. It appears that no rule of grammar would be violated if we made both words relate to one person. And now, bearing all this in mind, I turn to the late Dr. Handley Moule, remembering that he was both an exceptionally competent Greek scholar and also a deeply taught Bible expositor, and I discover that, in his *Devotional Commentary*, p. 101, in his paraphrastic translation, he makes the words both refer to one Person, to GOD Himself.

So, following so admirable a guide, here I am, down on this side of the fence! Following upon this decision

(i) **Of taken captive by Him,**" calls for a capital H. And it means that the people in view are

released from one captivity only to be embraced in another. II Corinthians 10:5 speaks of "**bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of CHRIST**" - in our present study it is not thoughts, but persons, that are thus happily arrested. But how beneficently, and magnificently, different is this second captivity. The actual word employed means "*to catch alive*."

It is used in only one other place in the New Testament, Luke 5:10, where our Lord promises "from henceforth thou shalt catch men." That is, "catch them alive." He was addressing professional fishermen; they would catch fish for destruction, but they should catch men for life. Souls will be different from soles. Let it be added that Satan captures for destruction, but the Master for life - eternal life.

How infinite a privilege it is if we are allowed to catch people for Him.

All too often we regard this honour all too lightly, and give all too little to its prosecution. C. H. Spurgeon, in his travel notes, says the herons were "standing in the water, still and motionless, as if they were stuffed birds. They will so stand, hour after hour, and never seem to move; and when, at last, a fish goes by, down goes that terrible bill, the fish is captured, and the fisher becomes again as motionless as before," And he adds, "If a bird can continue thus to watch for a little fish, we who are fishers of men ought to be willing to watch long for souls, if by any means we may save them."

Yes, indeed. So, through us, or independently of us, He captures souls out of their former bondage,

(ii) "**At His will**" - capital H again, and emphatically this time; for, in contrast to their former experience, their new captivity is to be used to serve His will.

Three wills are concerned - their own will had been lost, in their sad intoxication; Satan's will had been imposed upon them; now GOD's will is to be paramount.

The little word "**at**" is a purposive preposition, its proper significance is seen if we translate, as we should, "for the purpose of His will." That was the purpose of His enabling us to escape, that was the purpose of His taking us into His embrace: that we should now be devoted to the doing of His will; "Our wills are ours, to make them Thine," as our poet says. How all-attractive, how all-embracing is that will of His. You may remember those lines of Whittier's in his poem, "*The Common Question*":

"And so I sometimes think our prayers
Might well be merged in one;
And nest and perch and hearth and church
Repeat, 'Thy will be done'."

Well, Timothy, and you my readers, these are three of Groups you will assuredly meet - and that you must assiduously try to help. I think one of my reflections upon our study of this passage will be, How interesting people are, especially from the Christian point of view.

~ end of chapter 10 ~