

Portraits of the Christian

W. Ross Rainey

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The Christian as a Son

Have you ever thought much about portraits? No, not about such portraits as Leonardo di Vinci's celebrated Mona Lisa, which presently hangs in the Louvre at Paris, France, but about God's portraits in His precious Word.

In 2 Timothy 2 there are seven portraits of the Christian, and in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ they may be looked at as follows:

- AS A SON — CHRIST IS THE SAVIOUR AND LORD (2:1, 2).
- AS A SOLDIER — CHRIST IS THE CAPTAIN (2:3,4).
- AS AN ATHLETE — CHRIST IS THE TRAINER (2:5).
- AS A FARMER — CHRIST IS THE HUSBANDMAN (2:6).
- AS A STUDENT — CHRIST IS THE TEACHER (2:15).
- AS A VESSEL — CHRIST IS THE OWNER (2:20,21).
- AS A SERVANT — CHRIST IS THE MASTER (2:24-26).

The first of these seven portraits is readily gleaned from verse one where the beloved Apostle Paul refers to the young man Timothy as "my son." Earlier in this same letter, the last he ever wrote, Paul refers to his young colleague as "my own son in the faith" (in each instance "son" literally means child). Why did Paul call Timothy his child?

The answer at least in part, is disclosed in Acts 14:6. Paul and Barnabas, on the first missionary journey, preached the gospel of Christ at Lystra. This was Timothy's home city and it is quite probable that at that

time young Timothy was led to know the Lord Jesus Christ as his own personal Saviour by none other than the Apostle himself. At any rate, by the time we get to Acts 16:1-3, Timothy had developed into a splendid young Christian. Paul had done the reaping with regard to Timothy's salvation, but from the human standpoint no little credit for the salvation and growth of Timothy was due to the faithful sowing and fervent praying of his godly grandmother and mother, Lois and Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14, 15). Nevertheless, it was the power of God that transformed Timothy's life. Has that same power transformed your life?

In our study of the subject of son-ship we want to consider three major aspects of it, using this brief 2 Timothy 2 passage as a steppingstone to other Scriptures embracing this important and glorious theme. The first thing we want to consider is:

The Reception of Sonship

How does a little baby become a prince? There is only one way, and that is, he must be born into the family of a king. Only a king's son is a prince. In like manner, there is only one way whereby the sinner can become a child of God. He must be born into God's family by the New Birth, that is, he must be "born again," as the Lord Jesus instructed Nicodemus (John 3:3,7).

Two things must be clarified. First of all

Our position as sons. In John 1:12 we are told that when we receive the Lord Jesus Christ we receive the position of children of God. This right to be called the children of God comes as a result of being born into God's family, and John 1:13 plainly declares that this new birth is not

of human descent, or of human determination, or of human design but of GOD! Though we may not always act like His children, God plainly declares here that all true believers are His children. Such is our present and eternal position in Christ.

The second thing that must be clarified is

Our condition as sons. The question may arise, “How can such a passage as 2 Corinthians 6:17-18 be reconciled with John 1:12?” The answer is simply this. The former passage is talking about our practice, while the latter has reference to our position. If we do what the 2 Corinthians passage says, we who have believed on Christ shall behave like God’s sons and daughters and He will be able to act as a Father to us in all the fulness of such a blessed relationship.

This brings us to consider the second major aspect of our subject, and that is

The Rights of Sonship

A king’s son has certain rights, or privileges, which one who has not that position does not possess. The same is true of God’s children. They have rights which belong exclusively to those who are members of His family, having been born again by the power of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the classic passages on the subject of sonship is Romans 8:14-17 wherein at least seven privileges of every believer are revealed. They are as follows:

Deliverance from bondage (8:15 with Ex. 20:18, 19; Heb. 2:14-18). The Spirit of adoption (8:15).

Our “adoption” has primarily to do with our position; while the designation “children” has mainly to do with our relationship.

True relationship to the Father (8:15).

The witness of the Holy Spirit (8:16 with 1 John 5:8-10).

Heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (8:17).

Suffering with Christ (8:17 with Phil. 3:10; 1 Pet. 2:21; 4:13).

Glorified with Christ (8:17 with Rom. 8:30; 1 John 3:1-3).

It is important and instructive to note that the Greek word for “sons” (huiοι) in Romans 8:14 is different from the word translated “children” (tekna) in 8:16 - 17. W. E. Vine has briefly explained the difference between the two words as follows: “Huioi expresses the dignity of the position into which the child is brought, and the character which is consistent therewith. In his standing a believer is a child of God; in his state he should be a son of God, and only as he gives evidence that he is a son of God can he really claim to be a child of God” (The Epistle to the Romans, p. 119).

Finally, we come to the third major aspect of our subject — namely,

The Responsibility of Sonship

There are many responsibilities of sonship such as trusting, submission, obedience, and growing in grace, but the one we want to emphasize is revealed here in 2 Timothy 2:2. It is the important matter of not only telling others how to become the sons of God, but of committing these glorious truths to other Christians who in turn “... shall be able to teach others also.” In recent

years we have heard and read a great deal about atomic “chain reaction “ but here is a far greater and more important “chain reaction” that has been going on for almost two millennia among God’s sons and daughters. It is illustrated right here in 2 Timothy in the persons of Lois, Eunice and Timothy, respectively —(cf. 1:5; 3:15).

Guy H. King, in his very excellent exposition of 2 Timothy entitled, *To My Son* (which I highly recommend for all young people to read, including those who are eighty and over), recounts a very interesting and unusual “chain reaction.” He states that “Richard Sibbes, an old Puritan, wrote a little book called *The Bruised Reed*. One day it fell into the hands of a tin pedlar who gave it to a boy called Richard Baxter, who, through reading it, became in time the saintly Richard Baxter of Kidderminster. In process of time Baxter wrote *A Call to the Unconverted*, and by doing so kindled the flame in the heart of Philip Doddridge, who in turn wrote a book called *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*. This fell into the hands of William Wilberforce, changed his life, and led the great emancipator of the slaves to write *A*

Practical View of Christianity. By reading this the heart of Leigh Richmond underwent a strange blossoming, and, as one result, he wrote *The Dairyman’s Daughter*, which besides being the most powerful religious influence in the life of Queen Victoria had a good deal to do with the transformation of Thomas Chalmers, who in his turn touched the whole world. Precious chain! Every Christian thus occupies a strategic position; in modern phrase, he is a ‘cell’, a new centre of influence” (p. 39).

God wants and needs strong sons and daughters. But how can we be strong? Paul told Timothy, “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:1). The verb translated “be strong” literally means be strengthened. In other words, he says to the young man Timothy, keep in touch with the one true source of strength and power, Christ Himself.

In ourselves we can never be strong. Rather, it is realizing our utter weakness and, in complete dependence upon God, drawing upon the infinite supply of grace that is in Christ Jesus that will make us strong sons and daughters in Him, and for Him. This is something we must do daily through prayer, Bible study, quiet meditation, and bold —though not tactless — witnessing.

Let us remember, as Paul put it elsewhere, “when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Cor. 12:10).

The Christian as a Soldier

2 Timothy 2:3-4

Led by the Spirit of God, the Apostle Paul passes from the subject of Sonship (2:1, 2) to that of Soldiership (2:3, 4); from the family of God to the army of God.

How do we become soldiers in God's army? The answer is simple. We must enlist. Only by voluntary enlistment can we become soldiers in His "Salvation Army." He will not force us to join against our wills, though it is definitely His will that everyone enlist (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). Timothy voluntarily enrolled at Lystra (Acts 14:6), and became "a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (see Acts 16:1-3). Have you been to God's "Recruiting Office" to 'sign up' and thereby be made a new creature in Christ Jesus by receiving Him as your own personal Saviour and Captain? What a grand thing to be changed by the power of God, to change uniforms — from Satan's rags of sin to the Saviour's robe of righteousness — and to change sides, thereby to be united and linked with the risen, ascended, glorified, and soon coming Captain who has conquered every foe. The time to enlist is NOW (2 Cor. 6:2), while you are yet young, just as Timothy did.

On one occasion when returning from a meeting, it is reported that D. L. Moody told his hosts that there were two-and-a-half conversions. They smilingly said, "Oh yes, two adults and a child, presumably?" "Oh no," said Mr. Moody, "two children and an adult." The time to receive Christ is while you are young for then you have a whole life to offer and dedicate to God.

We want to consider three highly important lessons about the Christian as a soldier as revealed in this brief but blessed passage of Scripture. The first lesson we want to note is

His Divine Selection

Every soldier, and especially one in God's army, is chosen for a specific task (2:4). He is called upon to wage a courageous warfare and the Christian soldier eventually learns that he has not been drafted from the ranks of men, but divinely selected. As a cap-stone to the parable of the marriage supper, the Lord Jesus said: "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). God desires and needs hand-picked men and examples of His divine selection are found throughout the Scriptures (e.g., Moses in Exodus 3: Joshua in Joshua 1:1ff.; Gideon and his 300 in Judges 6 and 7; the disciples in John 15:16; and Paul in Acts 9:15, 16). To be sure, the examples just cited are outstanding ones. Nevertheless, what was true of them insofar as their divine selection is concerned is true of all believers. Here, then, is one of God's great secrets which He reveals to His own, a military secret, if you please. Once saved by God's grace and soldiers in His army, it may come as a surprise to learn that from the God-ward standpoint our Lord has chosen us, not we Him (John 15:16; Eph. 1:4), but such a discovery surely comes as a happy surprise, if also as a humbling one.

We come now to the second important lesson concerning the Christian as a soldier — namely,

His Designated Superiority

God's desire, design, and designation is that we be "good" soldiers of Jesus Christ. Today, in the fighting forces of our nation many prove to be bad soldiers and are a disgrace to the country they represent. Then too, especially in war time, there are some who outwardly wear the uniform of the army, but inwardly they are not true soldiers at all. Such are infiltrators, fifth columnists, spies — not loyal soldiers. This same condition prevails even in God's army, and in His Word the Lord has, time and again, warned His true soldiers about the infiltration of the enemy into the ranks (cf. Acts 20:29-31; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 2:18, 19).

Are you a "good soldier of Jesus Christ," a true (as the adjective "good" may be translated) soldier of His; or are you misrepresenting Himself and His army?

A soldier bearing the much feared and respected name of Alexander was brought before the famous conqueror, Alexander the Great, having been condemned for a crime he had committed. "What is your name?" asked the emperor. "Alexander, sir!" answered the trembling soldier. "Then either change your name or your ways," commanded Alexander, whereupon the wayward and condemned soldier was abruptly dismissed without further discipline in his case.

While it may not be possible to fully affirm the validity of the foregoing incident, its moral is excellent. Our classic chapter of 2 Timothy 2 has a very precious and practical text bearing upon this matter of living up to our name as Christians. Do you recall it? "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that

nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2:19). We do well to prayerfully ponder and diligently practise the truth of this great text. May we in no wise be guilty of bringing dishonour and discredit to that “Name which is above every name.”

There comes a time in the active career of a soldier when he is ordered to retreat and not to resist; to flee and not to fight. All good soldiers of Jesus Christ have orders from their Captain to “Flee ...youthful lusts” (2 Tim. 2:22), yet to “Fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12); to retreat in the face of temptation (1 Tim. 6:11), just as Joseph did (Gen. 39:12), yet to “Resist the devil” (Jas. 4:7 — the verb conveys the idea of a ‘once-for-all’ stand against the devil).

As we encounter and engage our enemies in our relentless spiritual warfare, let us make sure we are thoroughly familiar with our Captain’s commands for every circumstance and implicitly obey them.

We come now to our third and final important lesson relative to the Christian as a soldier, a lesson to which we give special emphasis.

His Dutiful Service

The dutiful service of “a good soldier of Jesus Christ” includes at least three things: Suffering, Separation, and Submission.

Suffering: Both H. C. G. Moule and J. N. Darby translate the opening words of 2:3 as: “Take thy share in suffering ...” (cf. 1:8 where the same Greek verb occurs). The thought expressed is that of fellowship in suffering, hardship, toil, and pain. Paul calls upon his young and trustworthy colleague, Timothy, to share with him the

suffering involved in a faithful gospel witness. This same thing is expressed and illustrated, in some measure at least, in the words and circumstances of the Captain of our salvation as He suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:38; Luke 22:28). Paul and Peter also lend expression to the same matter elsewhere in the Scriptures (Phil. 3:10; 1 Pet. 5:9).

H. C. G. Moule recalls that “In the early days of the English reformation a notable group of young student Christians was planted by Wolsey in his great foundation at Oxford, Cardinal College now Christ Church. All of them, unknown to the founder, were men powerfully influenced by Luther, and they all fell into inevitable trouble when their convictions were avowed. Sharers for a time of a loathsome prison, they discovered there the happiness and strength of fellowship. ‘Brothers indeed we were in those evil days,’ wrote one of the survivors, looking back long afterwards” (The Second Epistle to Timothy, p. 74).

Separation: The word “warreth” literally means “serving as a soldier,” and carries with it the thought of active duty. While it is true that a soldier has his times of rest, sleep, ease, and recreation, the whole purpose of his existence is a strenuous, vigorous one. The soldier viewed here is not on parade, or on leave, but on active duty. There is a conflict on and the man’s whole life is keyed up, ready for action.

Ours is an unremitting conflict, a warfare against the world, the flesh and Satan himself. From this army and battle there is no discharge, no demobilization. How much do we really know about the strenuous nature of the Christian life? This type of vigorous warfare

demands separation from all that would hinder active service and the realization of practical victory in fighting “the good fight of faith.” A true soldier of Jesus Christ will not be dabbling into politics, questionable pleasures, or be A. W. O. L. in this continuous conflict. He must be separated from any and all influences and ‘weights’ that would hinder him in combat. This separation, this clear-cut break with the entangling affairs of this life, is both for his own welfare and for that of the army to which he belongs.

Submission: Absolute obedience to his commanding officer is required of a soldier. The “good soldier of Jesus Christ” must be obedient to the Captain of his salvation. The issues of life and death are at stake. Delays are dangerous; disobedience is disastrous. Through our Captain we are “more than conquerors” (Horn. 8:37). He has given us the victory (1 Cor. 15:57), for to have Him as our Captain is to have the victory since He is the Victor. As we seek to faithfully press on in obedience to His commands and in the sufficiency of His strength, we realize in our practical experience the presence and power of Him who “always causeth us to triumph in Christ” (2 Cor. 2:14).

May our faithful God make us, and keep us, strong for Himself midst the unremitting conflict of the Christian life. Like Joshua and Caleb, Paul and Timothy, may we be faithful and obedient soldiers in the service of our victorious Captain, and at the end of life’s relentless conflict be able to say with Paul, in some measure at least: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to

me only, but also to all them that have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7, 8, A.S.V.).

General Gordon, the hero of Khartoum, drew up for himself the following four great principles: (1) Entire self-forgetfulness. (2) The absence of all pretension. (3) The refusal to accept as a motive the world's praise or disapproval. (4) To follow in all things the will of God, and to stay the soul on Him.

The famous general must have been a student of 2 Timothy, and who knows but what H Timothy 2:3-4, might have been among his favourite texts.

The Christian as an Athlete

Scripture Reading 2 Timothy 2:5

Continuing to pen his Spirit-inspired instructions to Timothy, his young “son in the faith,” the Apostle Paul takes us from the military world to the sports world; from the rugged routine of the battle-ready soldier to the rigorous requirements of the contesting athlete.

Whether it be a “Babe” Ruth in baseball; a “Red” Grange in football; a “Rocket” Richard in ice hockey; a Joe Louis in boxing; or a Bob Petit in basketball; somewhere along the line, even if only in a passive way, our interest and enthusiasm are aroused. Yet, no matter how keen our interest and enthusiasm may be in the realm of sports, it is well to keep in mind that the “crowns” and glory of the stadium are temporal and transient. Our interest and emphasis, as was Paul’s, must be upon the spiritual and the eternal. From 2 Timothy 2:5 we can glean a number of valuable spiritual lessons for positive Christian living with a view to winning God’s unfading “crowns” in that coming crowning day.

In our study of this particular portrait of the Christian as an athlete, we want to focus our attention on three main themes unfolded in our text, the first being,

The Runner (Wrestler)

The athlete was one of Paul’s favorite metaphors and this may be indicative that he was not averse to an occasional visit to the sports stadium when time permitted. It is not certain here whether the Apostle has the runner or the wrestler in mind. The Greek word he

employs is the one from which we get our word “athlete,” and in our text it is translated by the phrase “strive for the masteries.”

In either case, whether the runner or the wrestler is in Paul’s mind, an energetic figure is brought to our attention. As we look at the athlete’s strained muscles, tense face, and concentrated effort, we as Christians are reminded that ours should be, and must be, an all-out exertion and endeavor if we are to be faithful runners and wrestlers for the glory of God. The question to ask ourselves about our Christian testimony is, Do we really throw ourselves into the encounter with an all-out effort? (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24; Eph. 6:12; Heb. 12:1).

Let us remember that the Christian race is not a hundred yard dash, though there may be times when, like Philip the Evangelist, it will be necessary to exert extra effort in the carrying out of God’s will (Acts 8:29, 30). Mr. George Goodman once said that if Philip had not run he would have lost his text. Actually, the Christian race is more like a marathon and it must be run “with patience” (Heb. 12:1; illus. of Dan. 1:8, 21). Moses, Joseph, Joshua, Caleb, Daniel, Paul, John the Apostle, and Timothy are all examples of men who continued with patient steadfastness the race that was set before them in their service for God and His glory.

This brings us to our second major theme, and that is,

The Rules

The Christian cannot do as he pleases any more than the athlete can do as he likes or follow through with his own dictates and desires. There are rules of training and track which must be diligently adhered to if one is to be

classed and called a true contender. Paul had in mind the games which were held at such famous places as Olympia, Athens, Corinth, and Delphi. These games had various rules and regulations governing them, and fundamental to all was that the contestant or entrant be a TRUE BORN GREEK. Regarding qualifications for entry into the Greek games, Erich Sauer has interestingly stated the following: "Certain definite conditions were attached to taking part in the contests and gaining the victory. No slaves, but only free men were admitted; no foreigners but only citizens; no impious men or criminals, but only those without reproach. Freedom, citizenship, and civil honour were indispensable. And naturally, bodily strength and practice were required" (In the Arena of Faith, p. 55).

The Christian race is open only to those who are TRUE BORN BELIEVERS IN CHRIST (cf. John 3:3, 7; Jas. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23). Subsequent to the "New Birth" the believer has many "commandments" regulating and governing the race set before him, and implicit obedience to these "commandments" is the key to power, blessing, success, and crowning (John 14:15; 15:10). What are some of these "commandments"? Many others might be added, but the following list of seven basic and key "commandments" or precepts from the Word of God serve as definite rules regulating and governing the Christian race and the race of the Christian:

1. Love (Matt. 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8).
2. Prayer (Luke 18:1; Col. 4:2).
3. Reading God's Word (Josh. 1:8,9; 2 Tim. 2:15).
4. Witnessing (Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8; 1 Tim. 6:13).

5. Confession of Sin (1 John 1:9, 10).

6. Abiding in Christ (John 15:4; 1 John 2:28).

7. Fellowship with other Christians (Heb. 10:25).

Let us ever remember that in the lowly path that was His, our Lord Jesus Christ “pleased not Himself” (Rom. 15:3), but joyfully and perfectly submitted Himself to His Father’s will (Heb. 10:7; Matt. 26:39), and Christ is our Example that we should follow His steps (1 Pet. 2:21).

In a sense, SELF is the Christian’s main problem. Turn the word around, put an ‘H’ on the end of it, and you have the word FLESH! What is SELF, after all, but the FLESH? If we would run and wrestle successfully as believers, SELF must all the time and every time be disciplined and put in subjection to the point of utter exclusion (CF. Matt. 16:24; John 3:30; Rom. 6:6ff.; Gal. 2:20). The practical realization in the life of such passages just cited is the secret of what might well be called, “The Law of Successful Christian Living.”

Before focusing our attention on our third and final major theme, one last point is in order. Through the author of “The Letter to the Hebrews,” the Spirit of God exhorts believers to “lay aside every weight, and the sin (literally, sin, since the definite article is not in the Greek text) which doth so easily beset us ...” (12:1). No runner or wrestler takes any excess weight, or weights, into the arena with him. An overcoat is good and useful in its proper place, but it is entirely out of place insofar as the contending athlete is concerned. It would only serve as a hindrance to his all-out effort to win the prize. In like manner, the contending Christian athlete must be especially careful and prayerful about anything in his life that would merely be a “weight,” thereby hindering

him from winning God's approval and prize. The "weight" may be something good in itself, yet a definite hindrance to the believer. Surely, in this complex age in which we live, many believers are hindered from running and wrestling well because their lives are cluttered with such 'weights.' What about your life and mine?

As to "sin which doth so easily beset," unbelief is most certainly the chief besetting sin of believers. Such a conclusion is substantiated by the preceding context, the great FAITH chapter of Hebrews 11. Actually, an unbelieving believer is a paradox, something utterly foreign to the teaching of the New Testament regarding the Christian, yet experience causes us (or should cause us) to bow our heads and hearts before God our Father in confession of our besetting sin of unbelief.

The Rewards

The cost. It has been rightly said: "no cross; no crown." A price must be paid by the contending athlete in order to win the prize. In like manner, the Christian life — lived as it should be lived — is costly. A price must be paid if we are going to truly live for Jesus Christ. Consider the example of Moses (Heb. 11:26); the Apostle Paul (Phil. 3: 4ff.); and pre-eminent above all others, the Example of the Lord Jesus Christ and the infinite price He paid for our redemption (Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 12:1-3; 1 Pet. 1:18,19).

A young man was one day conversing with a Christian business man who had a sterling Christian testimony. "I'd give the world to have what you have," the young fellow remarked. "That's exactly what it cost," the business man kindly replied.

The crowns. Just as the contending athletes who were victorious in their particular field of endeavour were crowned, or rewarded, so “the crowning day is coming” for the believer who runs and wrestles faithfully for the Lord. He is some day going to reward His faithful servants (Rev. 22:12). To Paul, this was worth all the “blood, sweat, and tears” of the Christian’s pilgrim pathway (Phil. 3:7-14).

The unique thing about the Christian life is that it is possible for every contender to win the prize, and Paul urged the Corinthian saints (who were especially familiar with the classic Greek games) to so run and to so discipline themselves as to win the prize (1 Cor. 9:24-27). The victors in the Grecian games received merely a wreath or garland of leaves as a reward. Such soon faded away as did the accompanying glory. By way of contrast, the Lord’s rewards, or “crowns,” are unfading and eternal. These incorruptible rewards are to be diligently sought after, not set at naught.

There are five such “crowns” in the New Testament:

1. The Crown of Rejoicing, or The Soul-winner’s Crown (1 Thess. 2:19 with 2:3-6; Phil. 4:1).
2. The Incorruptible Crown, or The Victorious Runner’s Crown (1 Cor. 9:25).
3. The Crown of Righteousness, or The Watchful Warrior’s Crown (2 Tim. 4:8).
4. The Crown of Glory, or The Under-shepherd’s Crown (1 Pet. 5:4).
5. The Crown of Life, or The Martyr’s Crown (Jas. 1:12; Rev. 2:10).

The Lord Jesus Christ's "Crown of Thorns" is basic to the "crowns" held up before believers (Matt. 27:29). By virtue of His perfect faithfulness in finishing the work His Father gave Him to do, Christ has been "crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. 2:9). Therefore, the "crowns" offered to believers are made possible on the basis of Christ's finished work.

The Christian as a Farmer

These portraits of the Christian to which Ross Rainey calls attention have created an exercise in a number of hearts, a longing to make life more conformed to the high spiritual standards of the Word of God.

The author, after graduating from college, was called early like Timothy to the work of the Lord. He knows the practical side of Christianity as given pictorially in these articles for he writes out of daily experiences as well as from biblical knowledge. Three more articles are to follow.

The apostle Paul continues to emphasize the strenuous nature of the Christian life as he passes from the athletic world to the agricultural world. In the two previous metaphors of the soldier and the runner (wrestler) there is a certain amount of adventure, excitement, and thrill; but this is not generally true of the toiling tiller of the soil, or as Paul calls him, "the husbandman that laboureth." The farmer's life is characterized by hard work, patient waiting, and hopeful reaping.

All told, the writer has spent between three and four years of his life on a farm in the community of Fox-mead, Ontario, Canada, and can testify first-hand as to the farmer's hard work, disappointments, frustrations, and hum-drum routine; and yet of his joys, wholesome way of life, hopes, and harvests.

Clearly and concisely the Spirit-inspired Apostle writes of the farmer as follows: "The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits" (2 Tim. 2:6). Two things stand out in this text, the first being:

The Toil of the Farmer

At least five things are characteristic of the farmer which, of course, have their application to the Christian under this particular metaphor.

Persevering toil: The farmer's lot, even in our highly mechanized and technical age, requires persevering toil, especially if he is to be a successful farmer. In like manner, the Christian is exhorted to toil perseveringly in his appointed task, assured that he will reap an eternal reward if he is faithful. To the Corinthian saints the Apostle Paul writes: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). Surely, there is no finer example of persevering toil in the service of Christ than the Apostle himself, and, earlier in the same letter and chapter just referred to, he could sincerely, humbly, and truthfully state: "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (15:9,10). Silas, Timothy, and Epaphroditus are further sterling examples of persevering toil in the service of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Protracted hours: Just as the farmer must generally arise early and often work until dark, especially in harvest time, so the Christian can and must often expect long hours of toil in the fulfilment of his task. Linking Silas and Timothy with himself, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, reminding these saints of the character

of their walk and witness among them by stating: “But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day. because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God” (1 Thess. 2:7-9).

As an added note, let us remember that regardless of the duration of each day’s “labour of love” in the service of Christ, it is wise and well to commence and close each day in His presence. We can form no better habit in the ‘Christian life than to begin each day with the reading of God’s Word and prayer. This was the habit of the Psalmist — namely, David (Ps. 5:3; 63:1). Is it yours?

Periodic disappointment: Frosts and floods, droughts and damaging storms, pests and plant diseases are all so often the cause of trial and disappointment to the hard-working husbandman. On the same night in which He was betrayed, the Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples: “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). To the sojourners of the dispersion, scattered because of severe persecution, Peter encouragingly wrote: “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Pet. 4:16). And it was James, probably the earliest writer in the New Testament, who in writing to persecuted Jewish believers took for granted that Christians would experience various testings, when he stated: “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations (testings)” (Jas. 1:2). Yes, all true believers

in one degree or another will experience testings which in turn may bring disappointments, but let us remember that “Our disappointments are His appointments.”

Prodigious patience: Of all the virtues needed by the farmer, patience is probably the key one, and it is certainly a key virtue needed in the believer’s life, requiring testing for its development. That is why Paul wrote: “... we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience” (Rom. 5:3). Furthermore, the author to the Hebrews has written: “For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise” (Heb. 10:36). A little later on in the same letter, we are exhorted to “run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1). This is only possible as we are found “looking unto Jesus” (Heb. 12:2), the perfect example of patience.

Perpetual hum-drum: Finally, unless the unusual happens or something goes wrong, the farmer’s life is characterized day in and day out by the same old routine. Sometimes the Christian life is played up as being filled with daring deeds and exciting episodes. This may be so as an exception to the rule, but it is certainly not the rule. Let us look at Enoch’s life for a moment. Before his translation he walked with God for 300 years in a dark and difficult age. It is this writer’s firm conviction that if Enoch could testify today concerning his walk with God, he would declare that it was characterized far more by the resolute routine of daily living than by the exhilarating ecstasies of exciting experiences. That is not to say his walk with God was devoid of “mountain-top” experiences. From beginning to end it must have been a precious experience indeed, but generally speaking, it was undoubtedly a walk of

patient plodding and pressing on with God from day to day. Its secret was living faith in the living God, resulting in a testimony pleasing to Him and his ultimate translation into the presence of our Lord (Heb. 11:5).

With these things in view, it is no wonder Paul referred to the tiller of the soil as “the hard-working farmer” (R.S.V. trans.).

Summing up, H. C. G. Moule has aptly commented: “Here Timothy is led by contrast to a similitude totally devoid of excitement, remote from all glamour of peril and applause. The strenuous and prosaic toil of the tiller, his patience under uncertain seasons, his quiet waiting through pains for gains, this all is to enter deeply into the life of the Lord’s servant; plowing, sowing, tending, and then reaping at last. That supreme quality is here in view, so great in the Gospel scale of virtues — the patience that goes on!” (The Second Epistle to Timothy, p. 78).

This brings us to

The Spoil of the Farmer

The lot of the labouring husbandman is not all toil. After plowing, planting, and patience there comes a season of plenty when a rich harvest is reaped. Thus, as the courageous soldier is decorated, and the runner (wrestler) is crowned, so the toiling tiller of the soil is at last rewarded by a good crop. It is only right that the farmer be the first to partake of the fruit of his labour as a reward for his patient toil (cf. 1 Cor. 3:8). God will always recognize and reward diligent labour on the part of the believer (1 Tim. 5:17), and He is no man’s debtor (Heb. 6:10; 1 Cor. 3: 14).

The words of Psalm 126:5 and 6 are indeed applicable and appropriate in view of the metaphor of the hard-working farmer. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (see also 2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:7-9).

Today, more than anything else, God needs toilers in His harvest fields (Matt. 9:38). Does He have to say to any of us: "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" (Matt. 20:6).

The Christian as a Student

Scripture Reading 2 Timothy 2:15

The strenuous nature of the Christian life is by no means lost sight of as the Apostle Paul turns from the farm and the hard-working husbandman to the classroom and the serious-minded student. Continuing his personal letter to young Timothy, his “own son in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2; see also 2 Tim. 1:2), Paul advisedly writes: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). The crying need today in this troubled, turbulent, topsy-turvy “Jetomic Age” is for more young people to enroll in the “College of Mary” (Luke 10:39), to thereby become fitted to rightly divide “the Word of Truth”.

This great text of 2 Timothy 2:15 was the watchword, or slogan, of the Torrey and Alexander missions in Great Britain many years ago. It might well be adopted as the slogan, or motto, of every true Christian, for as Guy H. King has thoughtfully commented: “It seems to me to be a most delightful summing-up of a satisfactory Christian life, with a revelation of its secret, ‘the word of truth’” (To My Son, p. 68).

In the writer’s study there is just one text hanging on the wall. This beautifully finished plaster plaque bears the words of 2 Timothy 2:15 and serves as a constant reminder of his great responsibility as a servant of Jesus Christ.

In our study of this grand Bible text, we want to consider three major aspects clearly set forth in regard

to the serious-minded student of the Scriptures, the first being:

Diligence of the Student

Two things about the Christian as a student are revealed in the opening clause of our classic verse.

His presentation. The opening word, “study”, is in the imperative mood and means to “be diligent” or to “give diligence”. Since this verb in the Greek language is in what is known as the aorist tense, it implies that this matter of diligence is to be a once-for-all, or permanent, thing on the part of the Christian student. Does this kind of diligence seem too difficult to maintain and manifest? Yes, for us it is, but let us take to heart the encouraging and promissory words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:24: “Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it”. The expression, “to shew”, literally means “to present”. The whole idea is simply this: The true Christian student must be permanently diligent to present himself to God. He must be completely given over to the task and responsibility which is his sacred trust. It is interesting and enlightening to observe that the same root word, here translated “to shew”, is used in regard to yielding ourselves to God (Rom. 6:13); and in regard to presenting our bodies “a living sacrifice” to God (Rom. 12:1).

His purpose. The Christian student should be diligent to present himself “approved unto God”, for in a coming day his work is going to be tested by Him (1 Cor. 3:13; Jas. 1:12). In this life our faithful God desires and has designed that we be found: (1) Useful (2 Tim. 2:21); (2) Faithful (1 Cor. 4:2); and (3) Worthy of Reward (Matt. 25:21; 1 Cor. 3:14).

Therefore, let us be careful to always remember that everything we do in the Christian life should be wrought with a view to God's approval, not man's (Col. 3:17, 23, 24). As in all key matters, so in this, the Lord Jesus Christ has left "us an Example, that ye should follow His steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). We do well, then, to recall the earlier words of the Apostle Peter recorded in Acts 2 as part of his great Pentecostal sermon, even though a different Greek word is employed for the verb "approved". "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God among you ..." (v. 22).

In order to be a truly diligent Christian student it takes: (1) Preparation of the Mind; (2) Presentation of the Body; and (3) Perseverance of the Will.

We come now to the second major aspect of our classic text, and that is,

Discipline of the Student

The true Christian student must be "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed", and this requires strict discipline. First of all, what are some of the things that will cause God's workman to be ashamed in that day, when all earthly classroom work is finished and he stands in Christ's presence to be graded? There are many others, of course, but we suggest three things that will bring shame in that day as to the kind of work turned in.

If he works: (1) Slothfully (Prov. 6:6ff.; 18:9; 24:30ff.; Eccles. 10:18; Rom. 12:11; Heb. 6:11-12); (2) Slovenly (Jer. 48:10); and/or (3) Spasmodically (1 Cor. 4:2).

Happily, we turn to those qualities of work that will not only make God's workman unashamed in that day, but will bring an eternal reward from His hand. It is here that the proper emphasis belongs. Though many other qualities might be added, as a balance to what has preceded, we suggest three that should characterize the work of every Christian student. He should work: (1) Sacrificially (Josh. 1:8; Acts 15:25-27; Phil. 2:25-30); (2) Systematically (2 Cor. 14:33, 40); and (3) steadfastly (1 Cor. 15:58).

In that coming day will we be ashamed or unashamed? How you are living and working now will determine the ultimate answer (1 John 2:28).

This brings us to our third and final major aspect disclosed in 2 Timothy 2:15 — namely,

The Duty of the Student

Regarding the Christian student, two things are readily observed in the closing words of this great text, First of all,

His textbook. The student and books belong together, and the Christian student's one primary Textbook is "the Word of Truth". Paul was a keen student, whether in or out of prison, and this is reflected in 2 Timothy 4:13 (see also Acts 26:24). His reference to and request for "the books" probably included both secular and sacred writings, the latter comprising copies of Old Testament books, but Paul's special request was for "the parchments". Parchment was more expensive than papyrus and these were undoubtedly copies of Old Testament books, possibly including copies of the sayings of the Lord Jesus (Luke 1:1-4).

The Holy Scriptures are the Christian student's tool, and by diligent study and practice he must learn to use it skillfully (Eph. 6:17 with Matt. 4:1-11). He must not blunt it through misuse, or let it rust from disuse. He must in every sense be indeed a man of the Book (cf. Josh. 1:8, 9; Ps. 119:9, 11, 105; 1:1-3; Jer. 15:16; 2 Tim. 1:13, 2:15-18; 3:14-17; 4:2).

The second thing revealed at the close of our text in regard to the Christian student is

His task. This is the highly important matter of "rightly dividing" God's Word. This phrase of two words is actually one word in the Greek text and it literally means "cutting straight". The learned doctors of Bible scholarship disagree as to its exact meaning, the word occurring only here in the New Testament. The metaphor could refer to: a stonemason, as one cutting stones to fit properly in a building; plowing a furrow; laying down a road (Prov. 3:6; 11:5 LXX); or to Paul, a tent-maker, cutting camel's hair cloth straightly.

John Calvin likened this expression to making "straight slices" as of a wonderful Bread of Life. Whatever the definite metaphor might be, one thing is clear, "straight" is emphatic. Dispensationalism is only referred to indirectly, for it can hardly be said that Paul here had it in mind. Rather, the contrast is between truth and error (cf. 2:14, 16, 17, 23). However, the avoidance of error and arriving at the truth is only possible by recognizing dispensational distinctions. The words of 2 Peter 1:20 and 3:16 are especially appropriate regarding this all-important matter of "cutting in a straight line" (J.N.D.) the Word of God.

The well known New Testament scholar, A. T. Robertson, has humorously yet truly remarked: "Certainly plenty of exegesis is crooked enough (crazy-quilt patterns) to call for careful cutting to set it straight" (Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. IV, pp. 619-20).

May all who are enrolled in the "College of Mary" (Luke 10:39) pass with flying colours the coming test at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:12ff), and receive from Him the degree of A.U.G. — "Approved Unto God".

Regarding the Word of Truth, someone has said:

"Know it in the heart,

Stow it in the head,

Sow it in the world,

Show it in the life."

The Christian as a Vessel

Scripture Reading, 2 Timothy 2:20-21

Passing from the classroom and the serious-minded student the Apostle Paul is led by the Holy Spirit to the metaphor of “a great house” and the variety of vessels within.

This brief passage poses a problem of interpretation, out of which two schools of thought have arisen. Some Bible students take the “great house” to refer to the invisible Church, that is, to the one true Body of Christ; whereas others in a much wider sweep of thought look at it as representative of Christendom, that is, to the visible, external Church in which there is a mixture — the tares among the wheat; unreality midst reality; unbelief midst belief; unfaithfulness midst faithfulness; false profession midst true possession; wolves and pigs among sheep.

There are recognized conservative scholars supporting both sides of the issue, though the majority seem to lean toward the Christendom school of thought. Personally, the writer prefers not to press the metaphor, but to look at it as any “great house,” in distinction from any little house, in which a variety of vessels and utensils would normally be found. Some vessels are prominent and some are not, yet all in their proper place are useful whether or not they are displayed. The metaphor would seem to suggest “the House of God” (see 1 Tim. 3:15), though the writer is by no means dogmatic about this. Many Bible students sincerely disagree with this line of interpretation, but it is hoped that such will agree to disagree without being disagreeable.

As our study progresses we shall seek to answer key questions which arise regarding the details of the passage and its interpretation. Presently, however, let us plunge into this interesting and intriguing subject of the Christian as a vessel and note first of all

His Classification

The Apostle Paul classifies the various vessels in this “great house” as vessels of “gold ... silver ... wood ... earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour.” Since no reflection is cast upon the vessels of wood and earth, it is unwarranted to say that these are vessels of dishonour and refer to the unsaved. First of all, such a view would tend to induce a sense of superiority on the part of the gold and silver vessels, that is, the saved. Surely, this would not be the intent of Paul, and we know only too well that sometimes (and unfortunately so for the sake of Christian testimony) the conduct and conversation of the unsaved person is superior to that of the saved person. Secondly, the word for “dishonour” is used only twice in the New Testament in the sense of “disgrace” (Rom. 1:26; 1 Cor. 11:14). Generally, it simply means “without honour” (cf. Matt. 13:57; Rom. 9:21; 1 Cor. 4:10; 12:23, 24; 15:43; 2 Cor. 6:8; 11:21).

C. F. Hogg has commented: “I judge that the illustration of the ‘great house’ points to the ‘House of God’ which certainly is not Christendom, for that is ‘a hold of every unclean spirit.’ In the House of God there are many kinds of service. Some servants serve under the observation of men and are honoured for their works’ sake. Some serve in obscurity, and are either little known or altogether unknown to men, though they are well known to God. These also have an honourable part

in the work of the household; indeed ‘they also serve who only stand and wait’” (What Saith the Scripture?, p. 124).

To the foregoing might be added the reminder that “there are diversities of gifts” (1 Cor. 12:4) in the one true Church. Some have a greater gift (or gifts) than others, but whether we be classified as gold, silver, wood, or earth, all are equally precious in God’s sight and the same infinite price was paid for all (Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19). If the word for “dishonour” is taken to mean “disgrace,” it must be remembered that believers sometimes bring dishonour on the Name of the Lord (e.g., Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:1-11; Demas, 2 Tim. 4:10). Because of this some will “suffer loss” (1 Cor. 3:15) at the Judgment Seat of Christ and thus be “saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Cor. 3:15). This is a sobering thought and something to keep in mind throughout our earthly sojourn. For the Christian the Judgment Seat of Christ should be one of the greatest of all incentives to holy living (2 Cor. 5:10, 11).

This brings us to the second major aspect regarding the Christian as a vessel — namely,

His Consecration

Regardless of the measure of his gift, every believer can and should seek to be “a vessel unto honour.” Though our Lord has graciously promised: “them that honour Me, I will honour” (1 Sam. 2:30), this is secondary. Preeminent above all else is the honour of our Lord Jesus Christ (Col. 1:18), and it is the Christian’s responsibility and privilege to always seek His honour midst an evil, dishonourable world that has rejected the Son of God.

The condition. The secret of being “a vessel unto honour” is disclosed in the opening words of 2:21: “If a man therefore purge himself from these...” The Greek word for “purge” is intensive and is found only one other place in the New Testament (1 Cor. 5:7). Its tense signifies decisive separation, and the word literally means “to cleanse thoroughly,” or “to cleanse out.”

Now, the question arises, to what does the word “these” refer? C. F. Hogg relates it to the things of 2:16, 17, 22 and 23, excluding any mention of Hymenaeus and Philetus (2:17). By way of contrast, William Hoste has pointed out that the Greek might mean either “these men” or “these things,” and that the exhortations to “shun” (2:16), “depart from” (2:19), etc., seem to cover “these things.” Therefore, in view of this he states: “Personally I am inclined, without wishing to be dogmatic, to hold that it was separation from evil teachers the Apostle had in view, which seems more consonant with the form of the Greek of ‘to purge ourselves out of.’ It is clearly impossible to purge ourselves from evil things, if we condone evil persons and teachers. There must be compromise and contamination. In teaching this the importance of cleansing the ‘inside of the platter’ is not minimised; the reverse is mere Pharisaism; but if we frequent men who are unsound in the faith, we must either testify against their error or tacitly admit it. In the latter case we grieve the Holy Spirit and prevent His filling us so as to be His ‘vessels unto honour’” (Bible Problems and Answers, p. 372).

Undoubtedly, included in the word “these” would be such dishonourable men as Hymenaeus and Philetus. Of course, it is obvious that the nearest antecedent to the

word “these” is the word “dishonour” (2:20). The latter could refer to believers whose lives are unclean or whose testimonies are virtually nullified because of compromise, worldliness, and fleshly pursuits. From such the believer should separate himself (1 Cor. 5:11), that is, if he is going to be “a vessel unto honour.” This does not mean that he should not be friendly toward such or not pray for them, but he is not to have fellowship with them lest he soon find himself one of them and thereby no longer “a vessel unto honour.”

The consequences: Four things will be true of every believer who purges himself from all that is unclean, second-rate, and a hindrance (see Heb. 12:1, 2) in really living Christ.

“A vessel unto honour.” The word used here for “honour” occurs time and again in the New Testament (cf. John 4:44; Rom. 2:10; 9:21; 12:10; 13:7; 1 Tim. 1:17; 5:17; Heb. 2:7, 9; 1 Pet. 3:7; 2 Pet. 1:7 Rev. 5-12, 13; 21:24, 26). It is translated “price” in 1 Corinthians 6:20, and “precious” (lit., “the preciousness”) with reference to Christ in 1 Peter 2:7.

“Sanctified”: The words “saint,” “sanctify,” “holy,” and “holiness” come from the same root word employed here. Furthermore, the root word in both Hebrew and Greek has one uniform meaning throughout Scripture, and that is, to set apart. “The word never has reference to inward cleansing, still less to the eradication of the carnal nature” (A. W. Pink). That the word has nothing to do with inward cleansing is borne out in John 17:19. Sanctification is a work of the Triune God (Jude 1; Heb. 10:10 with 13:12 1 Pet. 1:2) and like salvation has a past, present, and future tense (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1

Thess. 3:13; 5:23). The effective ground of the believer's sanctification is, of course, the blood of Christ (Eph. 5:26; Heb. 9:13). Christ's sanctification is twofold: (1) He set Himself apart at the cross (John 10:18; Heb. 10:14; 13:12); and (2) He is presently set apart in Heaven as the glorified God-Man, the object of His people's affection, gaze, and worship (Heb. 7:25).

The believer's obedience to the Word of God is the measure of his practical sanctification (John 17:15 with 17). God grant that as saints we might be more saintly; that as those not now sinless we might sin less; that as sanctified in His sight we might be characterized by sanctity.

Since the Greek participle is in the passive mood, it is God who does the sanctifying.

Serviceable: The phrase, "meet for the Master's use," is actually one word in the Greek and is found only two other times in the New Testament (Philem. 11; 2 Tim. 4:11). In both instances it is translated "profitable."

Guy H. King has rightly said: "That cracked plate ... or that dirty cup, would not be meet for His use; it would be quite unusable for such a Master. There is a whole lot that He will have to do to us before He can make us really usable to Himself. Up to a point He can use anybody, in any condition: God has often used utterly godless men to work out His purposes in the world. We see that in the Bible, as well as in the history of the Christian Church; but He can never use us to the full, never use us as He wills, until, and unless, we are made usable" (To My Son, p. 76).

Set. The word for "prepared" is found many times in the New Testament (Matt. 3:3; John 14:2; Heb. 11:6), and it

is also translated “make ready” (Mark 14:15). Since the participle is in the passive mood, the work of preparing is God’s.

Are we really ready for every good work? Philip the evangelist was! He had been preaching to great crowds in Samaria and revival had broken out, but when he was called upon to leave that great work in order to minister to just one — an Ethiopian eunuch — he obeyed, he was ready (Acts 8:5-8, 26ff.). It is feared that some are prepared unto every great or glowing work, but not unto every good work.

Only as we decisively cleanse ourselves from all defiling influences, including persons, shall we really be vessels unto honour, set apart by God, usable, and made ready by Him to spend and be spent, ready to do anything, anytime, anywhere, and at any cost. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the perfect and supreme Example of these great truths.

At the close of his comments on these two verses, H. C. G. Moule has prayerfully written: “Lord and Master, make us thus fit ourselves for that infinitely precious privilege, a state of consecrated readiness for Thy holy use. We are altogether Thine. Enable us as such to so ‘cleanse ourselves from’ complicity with evil within and without that we, when Thou requirest us for Thy purposes, may be found by Thee handy to Thy touch, in the place and in the condition in which Thou canst take us up and employ us in whatever way, on the moment, for Thyself” (The Second Epistle to Timothy, p. 97).

The Christian as a Servant

2 Timothy 2:24-26

In this seventh and final portrait of the Christian in 2 Timothy 2, the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul passes from the theme of “a great house” and the various “vessels” therein to that of “the servant of the Lord” and his ministry.

The Lord Jesus Christ was the Perfect Servant and the Apostle Peter reminds all believers that “... Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). Like John Mark we are all, even at our very best imperfect servants. Yet, Mark’s life illustrates the fact that failure in our service does not necessarily mean the end of our usefulness (cf. Acts 13:5; 15:39 with Col. 4:10, 11; 2 Tim. 4:11). It was John Mark, the imperfect servant, whom the Spirit of God chose to write the Gospel of Mark which portrays the Lord Jesus as God’s Perfect Servant.

Of the five different words found in the Greek New Testament relative to ‘service’ and the ‘servant’, the word used here in 2 Timothy 2:24 is *doulos* meaning “enslaved,” “subservient,” “enthralled,” referring to “a person of mean condition” (cf. Acts 16:17; Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 7:22; 2 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 1:1; 2:7; etc.).

As we consider the theme of “The Christian as a servant,” we do best to continually look off unto Jesus, the Perfect Servant, and learn from His spotless example what the character and quality of our own service must be if we are to realize true power and fruit in and through our lives for His eternal glory (cf. Mark

10:45; John 12:26; 13:14-17; Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 4:2; Eph. 6:6; Phil. 2:5-8).

Let it be emphasized right at the beginning of our study that one cannot serve until, first of all, he has been saved (Eph. 2:8-10). Are you saved? This is the all-important and initial issue you must settle before you can truly serve the Lord.

With these introductory things in mind we want to look now at the verses before us and prayerfully note what the Holy Spirit has to say about the servant of the Lord. Two main aspects of our subject are unfolded in this brief passage, the first being

The Manner of the Servant

It is quite true that the servants of Christ, and all of God's people, are exhorted to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). However, contending for the faith is hardly what Paul has in mind here. Rather, as C. H. Irwin has so adequately expressed it, "The servant of the Lord must not be quarrelsome in the way in which he maintains the truth." There are all kinds and classes of people in the world who take great and special delight in opposing the Word of God, and by so doing they actually oppose themselves. Such are always looking for an argument, not because they sincerely desire to come to a knowledge of the truth but because they love an argument. They are like the Irishman who purposely lets his coat drag on the ground for someone to step on just because he loves a row. Let us ever keep in mind that arguing always results in more heat than light. Therefore, the true servant of Christ will consistently "avoid" 2:23) all such entanglement and embroilment.

This, then, must always be the manner of every servant of the Lord Jesus, he “must not strive” (cf. John 6:52; Acts 7:26; 2 Cor. 7:5). Regarding this aspect of our subject, H. C. G. Moule has aptly commented as follows:

“Timothy is to ‘decline’ taking these problems up as a mere disputant. He may be right to inform himself as to opinion, but he is not to ‘fight’ the ‘enquirers’ — in their own arena. For he, ‘the Lord’s bondservant,’ is not a philosopher but a messenger, not a theorist but an ambassador, carrying a commission holy, unalterable, divine. In his relations with alien thought he is bound therefore, most and always, to keep true in spirit to his Master. The ‘independent thinker’ is to find him invariably dependent upon a Person who is, for him, absolute Truth and absolute Authority. He is not indeed to make a virtue of ignorance, or a merit of unintelligence. He is ... to take care that his holy message is delivered with all the reasonableness of one who has really learned at the feet of Christ, and who can sympathize with perplexity, and who understands something of his own limitations” (The Second Epistle to Timothy, pp. 102 - 103).

We come now to the second main aspect of our subject, and that is

The Ministry of the Servant

Four specific qualities should characterize the ministry of the servant of Jesus Christ as he deals with others, in particular with those who by their rejection of the truth oppose themselves.

Gentle to all. The word translated “gentle” also means “mild” or “kind” (cf. 1 Thess. 2:7; Gal. 5:22). As a sinner,

David had experienced the gentleness of the Lord and as one virtually overwhelmed by God's gentle dealings with him, he wrote: "And thy condescending gentleness hath made me great" (Ps. 18:35, J.N.D.).

So often it is true, as it was in Elijah's day, that the Lord is not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire, but is revealed and found in "a still small voice" (1 Kings 19:11, 12). Might we say, in "a still gentle voice?" How much the quality of Christian gentleness is needed today in an increasingly perplexed and perilous age. Yet, we must keep in mind that our gentleness, as with our love, must be in the truth. In other words, we must never sacrifice God's truth for the sake of gentleness or love. Our Lord is the perfect example of gentleness in all His dealings with men, yet when it came to exposing the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees, His always gentle manner was firm and His always gracious speech was "seasoned with salt" (cf. Matt. 23:1-36).

Apt to teach. This phrase is actually one word in the Greek text, and the same word is used earlier by Paul in regard to the necessary qualities of bishops (1 Tim. 3:2). H. C. G. Moule translates it: "explanatory." By conduct and conversation all true believers in Christ should seek to explain the truth to unbelievers, even to those who are adamant in their stand against the truth. Every Christian, and in particular every servant of Christ engaged in a specific task and assuming various responsibilities, should be able to explain God's Word to unbelievers. We may not have the specific gift of a teacher, but as the servants of Christ we should be "apt to teach." In other words, we should be ready and able to present and explain the truth to others, especially in regard to salvation (1 Pet. 3:15).

Patient. This word carries with it the idea of “forbearing” or being “patient will all.” It is a medical term and the scholar David Smith states that it signified “a sufferer who bore his malady bravely and uncomplainingly.” We must bear and forbear with those who oppose the truth. If we search long enough we shall find that there are many underlying reasons why some people take a vehement stand against the truth. Guy H. King (To My Son, p. 83) has suggested four reasons which we briefly present as follows: A virtually heathen background, a bitter experience in life, the inconsistent example of a professing Christian or Christians, and moral defeat in the life. Perhaps you can add other reasons, to the list.

Meekness. Meekness is not weakness. Rather, it may be defined as “harnessed might,” Moses being the classic example of meekness in the Old Testament (Ex. 32:32; Num. 12:3). The Lord Jesus Christ, God’s Servant-Son is the perfect example of meekness. Throughout His entire ministry in the accomplishment of our redemption, He was perfectly submissive and obedient to His Father’s will and finished the work He was given to do (John 6:38; Matt. 26:39).

Now, it is in meekness, as those under the control and direction of the Holy Spirit that we are to “correct” or “school” (see Tit. 2:12 for the same root word) those that oppose the truth, prayerfully hoping that God will cause them to repent and fully acknowledge the truth. Repentance, however, must come first (illus. of 2 Kings 5-11, 15; contrast the lack of repentance on the part of those in 2 Pet. 2:21).

Of those who truly repent and come to a clear, full acknowledgement of the truth, two things are said in 2:26: first, they escape the snare of the devil; and second, they escape for the purpose (the prep. "at" is purposive) of doing God's will. The phrase, "recover themselves," is best summed up and explained by a quotation from Dean Alford: "These people have, in a state of intoxication, been entrapped; and are enabled, at their awaking sober, to escape." The same root word for "recover" is used in 1 Thessalonians 5:6 and 8 and translated "sober." The parable of the prodigal son vividly illustrates the truth set forth here (Luke 15:17).

A problem arises in connection with the pronouns in the latter part of 2:26. There are four views regarding the "him" and "his." Some say (very few) that both pronouns refer to the devil, some that the first refers to the servant; the second to God, some that both pronouns refer to God, some others (and this is the generally accepted view) that the first refers to Satan; the second to God.

The verb for "captive" means "to catch alive," and significantly it is used only one other place in the New Testament (see Luke 5:10).

Three wills are involved in 2:26 (four, if view 2. is taken): God's, the devil's, and the individual's. As the poet has said: "Our wills are ours, to make them Thine."

May our wills be completely given over to our Lord that He in turn may make us model servants for His eternal glory and for the blessing of those with whom we come in contact who are yet out of Christ, opposing the truth and themselves, and ensnared by the devil.