

THE FIRST EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY.

CHAPTER V. VERSES 17-25.

FROM Widows St. Paul turns to the duties, dangers, and claims of the Presbytery.

Verse 17.—*Let the elders who preside* (or govern) *well, be counted worthy of double honour* (or remuneration). This interpretation is rendered necessary by the passages of Scripture subsequently advanced to support the injunction touching this "double honour." There is no contrast intended with the honour paid to widows, nor is the word "double" used in a strictly arithmetical sense. Increased consideration may be demonstrated by practical provision for their wants. The fundamental idea of the Presbyterate is presidency or rule; and at a time when false teachers were doting over frivolous questions, and the seeds of social dissension were sown in the heart of the Church, the faculty, the *charism*, of rule was of inestimable value. The idea is thoroughly Pauline (cf. 1 Cor. ix. 4-12; Gal. vi. 6), that those who "minister the Gospel should live of the Gospel," *especially those rulers who labour* (unto weariness) *in word and doctrine*. Great emphasis has been laid upon a contrast supposed to be drawn here between the ruling and teaching elder. All that can be positively asserted is that the presidents of the Church, whose toil was especially characterized by good teaching, or whose rule in the Church was strengthened by their power and success in handling God's Word, had a special, though not exclusive, claim upon the "double honour." It is hard work to

teach well, to bring forth from the deep fountains of truth the adequate supply. It would be very desirable for the Church to lay this injunction to heart. There are certainly some positions in the Church for which kings might strive and which merchant princes might be glad to exchange for their own. The honour of all kinds lavished on a few, and the influence, the wealth, and the dignities of many are peerless; but the enormous majority of those who labour with self-abnegating love, in word and doctrine, do so, pinched by poverty and privation, depressed by physical and social hopelessness. Loving service cannot be paid for in cash. Intellectual and spiritual toil cannot be remunerated by anything short of intellectual and spiritual response, by payment in kind; but that is no reason why those who do labour unto exhaustion for Christ and his Church should not be saved from needless torture, or should be compelled to live in agonizing mendicancy.

Verse 18.—*For the scripture saith* (this scripture is written in Deut. xxv. 4, and is quoted in a similar typical and broad significance in 1 Cor. ix. 9), *Thou shalt not muzzle an ox while treading out corn.*¹ Among the Heathen a basket was placed round the mouths of slaves and oxen while threshing or grinding.² The idea of the passage is, that there should be liberality and trust, as well as sustenance, awarded to those who labour in word and doctrine.

¹ There were two ways in which the oxen separated the grain from the ear: by being driven continually through heaps of corn, or by dragging over and through it "a sharp threshing-instrument having teeth."

² Cf. Palm and Rost, art., *πανσικάπη*; and Smith's "Dictionary of Christian Antiquities," art., "Agriculture."

The second quotation is not a verbal adoption of Levit. xix. 13, or Deut. xxiv. 14, though our Lord (Matt. x. 10) makes a similar quotation in reference to the same matter. This fact is quite enough to account for Paul's use of the expression. He knew the "words of the Lord Jesus," which had not been recorded in any Gospel. His authority was enough. The λέγει ἡ γραφή applies strictly to the first quotation; the second is a sentence already made sacred in the lips of the Saviour, *And the labourer is worthy of his hire.*

Varied and abundant as the illustrations of ministerial duties are, the Apostle seems to turn in any direction rather than to the Jewish priesthood for analogy or typical representation. He cites the "prophet," the "father," the "builder," the "soldier," the "workman," the "racer," the "athlete," the "ox," the "day labourer," but not the priest.

Verse 19.—Do not receive an accusation against an elder (a presbyter), *except¹ in the presence of two or three witnesses.* Here Timothy, who is not a judge, has, however, to act upon the letter and in the spirit of the law contained in Deut. xix. 15. (Cf. Matt. xviii. 16.) Paul was anxious that his converts should not rush into law courts, but rather suffer wrong than fight for redress in the Heathen tribunals and before the unbelievers. He recommended arbitration among themselves, and suggested that Corinth could surely find wisdom, independence, and impartiality adequate to the execution of such a task. The visit of Timothy

¹ Ἐκτός εἰ μὴ, an exception pleonastically and powerfully stated; ἐπι, in this sense, is similarly used with δικαστήριον. Jelf, Greek Grammar, § 526.

to Ephesus would provide the day and the man for the settlement of such disputes. If accusations must be brought in his presence or laid by himself against those who had the confidence of the Church, they must be on the faith of "two or three witnesses." Explanation or vindication is superfluous.

Verse 20.—*Those that sin*, i.e. are sinning, probably a reference to those who refuse the advice or remonstrance of the "two or three witnesses." The opinion of Ellicott and many others is, that the Apostle is here referring to any flagrant transgressors who might be members of the Church. I own that, though this is a perfectly legitimate translation of the passage, I prefer Huther's interpretation that St. Paul was thinking, in the main, of those presbyters against whom the accusations of which he had spoken had been laid: these *rebuke before all* (the presbyters, or all the members of the community), *that the rest may have fear*.¹ The inconsistencies of those who make a great profession of faith are more dangerous than those of the ordinary Christian, and need sharper discipline. Timothy has no right to hush up scandal or to deal so quietly with habitual offenders as to run any danger of personal compromise.

Verse 21.—*I adjure thee*; in certain other passages the word here used has the sense of "solemn testimony" rather than adjuration (see 1 Thess iv. 6; 2 Tim. ii. 14; iv. 1), but the following words heighten the force of the expression: *before God and Christ Jesus*. It is not necessary to discuss the supposed application in this verse of Granville Sharp's rule (affirmed by Middleton, modified by Green), that

¹ This expression is a very rare one, though found in Herod. viii. 12.

“when two or more personal nouns of the same gender and number are connected by the copulative *καί*, if the first have the definite article, and the second not, they both refer to the same person.” There may be a unity of agency thus intimated, though not identity of personality. (See Acts iii. 11, and iv. 19; Ephes. v. 5.) I solemnly charge thee *before God and Christ Jesus, and the chosen angels*. Paul repeatedly refers to the ranks of the heavenly hierarchy. The angels are generally supposed to be “good,” except the contrary is stated. It is easy to understand and believe that some of these holy ministers possess loftier powers than others do, and render more abundant ministry than others can. We know that they are our witnesses and guardians, and do always behold the face of our Father. Paul bids Timothy be stimulated by their presence, and adds, *that thou guard sacredly these things*. He refers to the last topic, bearing on ecclesiastical discipline, “these things,” which had been mentioned in the preceding verses.¹ Discharge these duties *without prejudice and without partiality*. These words thus translated are not used elsewhere in the New Testament, and the reading, *προσκήσιω*, a “challenge to legal proceedings,” instead of *προσκλισιω*, “inclination to one side rather than another,” has no sufficient authority and would not yield appropriate sense.

Verse 22.—*Lay hands hastily on no one; be not thou a sharer in the sins of others; keep thyself pure*. This has, I think, been too readily supposed to refer to a custom which was in vogue in

¹ See (in THE EXPOSITOR, vol. iii. p. 385) remarks on this kind of solemn emphasis, which is one frequently adopted in these Epistles.

later ages, viz., that of laying hands on those who were absolved from their sins, or received back into the fellowship of the Church after some grievous lapse. Since, however, the Apostle has referred in these Epistles, on two occasions, to the "laying on of the hands of the presbytery" upon Timothy, and, moreover, to the circumstance that the Apostle had himself joined in this solemn act, and since the habit or custom of "laying hands" dates back to patriarchal times as a symbol of prayer and sympathy and benediction (Gen. xlviii. 14; Levit. ix. 22, 23; Numb. xxvii. 18-23), I imagine that Timothy is receiving advice as to the sanction which, in his turn, he might in this symbolic act give to the election of presbyters or bishops in the Church. By being too lax in his choice he might become a sharer in the disgrace of their subsequent failure, and be tempted to prejudice and partiality in his judgment. If, as I think, this injunction refers to the sanction of the elective act of the Church, and, still more, if it denotes the conferment of ecclesiastical dignity or the welcome accorded by these means to the repentant, it renders the position of Timothy one of extreme difficulty and delicacy. It may be said that all the younger men who appeared to take their orders from Paul were accustomed to perform similar acts. This is, of course, pure conjecture as far as all the earliest literature is concerned, and there are many hints that no such sub-apostolic sanction was necessary or was indispensable to ministerial office. The ordination of Apollos by the brethren, and his commission to Corinth, where he took an analogous position with that of Paul, is a striking fact on the other side.

The venerable custom has been followed not only by Episcopal,¹ but by Presbyterian and Congregational Churches to the present day. There are those who repudiate all the help of symbolism, who baptize without water, celebrate the eucharist, or rather cherish eucharistic sentiments, without bread and wine; and so also there are others who do not hesitate to ordain elders without *cheirothesia*. The question of the validity or importance of Christian symbolism cannot be discussed here. It is of comparatively small significance by the side of the deeper question of the relation of Timothy to these presbyters. This much is certain, that Timothy might be personally compromised by imprudent appointments; that he was a referee in cases of disputed questions concerning the moral character of the presbyters, and that he wielded the authority of the Apostle in the matter of censure or approval. Since, however, the Church at Corinth, in a case of terrible immorality, had been called upon to act in its corporate capacity, as if under the sanction of St. Paul, both in the matter of forgiveness and of rebuke, both in exclusion from and re-admission to Church communion, so here it becomes highly probable that Timothy was called upon to exercise the functions of a president or moderator of the Church court, guiding decisions that were ecclesiastically valid without him. It is with peculiar emphasis that St. Paul adds, "Keep THYSELF pure." Thou canst not judge without a pure mind; and whatever ecclesiastical problem is hinted at in the words, a solemn warning is given to all who are called upon to adjudicate in difficult cases of personal character.

¹ See Smith's "Dictionary of Christian Antiquities," art., "Imposition of Hands," vol. i. p. 828.

Verse 23.—Many conjectures have been hazarded about the puzzling verse here introduced. Heydenreich has suggested the desperately wild hypothesis that there was a blank piece of the page left after Paul had finished his letter, which was thus filled in, as a postscript, by the Apostle, without reference to the context. Ellicott has supposed that Timothy was given up to certain Essenic or ascetic practices, which were preying on his health, and he was reminded that there was a deeper inward purity than could be secured by water-drinking. Alford suggested that the frequent physical infirmities of Timothy had weakened his nerve for the discharge of his difficult duties, and therefore the Apostle gives the fatherly admonition: *No longer drink¹ water (exclusively), but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thy frequent infirmities.* The attempt to shew that *oivos* (the *yayin* of the Old Testament) is not intoxicating beverage has utterly failed, and the numberless injunctions and warnings against excess shew that the use of wine was not condemned *per se*. The introduction of the clause in this solemn argument is not without difficulty; but it is, at any rate, a piece of advice that could not have been invented for the Apostle in the midst of the second century. Our Lord gave some technical and detailed advice to his Apostles on the night of his Passion; and here Paul lays down the simple principle that attention to physical health is not only Christian and rational, but imperative, when serious demands are likely to be made on temper, nerve, and strength. Then, widening his reference

† The word occurs very rarely. It is found, however, in Herodotus.

and strengthening his special injunction by a broad principle, he adds,—

Verses 24, 25.—*The sins of certain persons are openly manifest,*¹ *going beforehand* (leading on) *to judgment*, i.e. the judgment of God entrusted to the Son of Man. Such are asking publicly, and before the time, for condemnation, and about these there can be no doubtful hesitation. Universal conscience will affirm the “rebuke before all” which it may be Timothy’s painful duty to pronounce. *In the case of others*, the sins *rather follow after* the sinner, crying for vengeance. To discern these effects, these proofs of inward and concealed sins, will require more skill and penetration of character.

In like manner, the good works of some are openly manifest: virtue, sacrifice, holy principle, true beneficence will come forth from their obscurity. Such light must illumine the darkness of this world. It is its law to shine. Those whose goodness cannot be discovered, whose Christian holiness cannot be discriminated from worldly prudence, and whose life is not revealed by either its luminousness or fragrance, are not fitted for high service in the Church; and, moreover, *those good works which are otherwise*, i.e. which make no startling call for recognition, *cannot*, and will not, *be ultimately hidden*. “Fear not,” said Christ; “there is nothing hidden which shall not be revealed.” Real excellence will sooner or later stand revealed. “We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.”

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¹ Πρόδηλοι has rather this sense than a temporal signification. Cf. Heb. vii. 14; 2 Macc. iii. 17; xiv. 39.