4. The cloak, the books, but especially the parchments

(2 Tim. 4:13)

Here is another obiter dictum; it raises no great problems, even if it does suggest a number of questions. In his Phases of Faith (1850) Francis William Newman tells how, as a young man, he went to be a private tutor in the family of a distinguished member of the Irish Bar, later to become Chief Justice Penefather. In that house he made the acquaintance of another young man, some five years older than himself, who was recuperating there from an accident which had temporarily crippled him. The year appears to have been 1827. Newman does not name the other young man, but refers to him as 'the Irish clergyman'; it is evident, however, that he was no other than John Nelson Darby. Newman and Darby discussed many important subjects together, and Newman recorded in retrospect that, for the first time in his life, he found himself 'under the dominion of a superior'. In those days Newman, like his elder brother the future Cardinal, ranked as an evangelical, but he had never met a man so resolved as Darby was that no part of the New Testament 'should be a dead letter to him'. 'I once said: 'But do you really think that no part of the New Testament may have been temporary in its object? for instance, what should we have lost, if St. Paul had never written the verse. "The cloak which I have left at Troas, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments."' He answered with the greatest promptitude: "I should certainly have lost something for that is exactly the verse which alone saved me from selling my little library. Not every word, depend upon it, is from the Spirit, and is for eternal service."' (pp. 29 f.).

We may be sure that the primary purpose of Paul's words was not to dissuade Timothy or any other reader from selling his "little library", as Darby in an excess of asceticism had been tempted to do. But what then was their primary purpose? It is unusual to find Paul attaching such importance to things. One is never surprised to find him attaching importance to persons: when, for example, he says two verses earlier,
Where the love of money is the driving force in a person’s life, it may lead to all sorts of evil; Christians are therefore put on their guard against it.

bound of beef, he might not think it a fair exchange. But if I deliver my lecture in an institution which is willing to pay for such things, and use some of the money I get for it to buy meat, my butcher will be well content. What the apostle deprecates is the love of money. But is the love of money really the root of all the evils that there are? There are some who are motivated rather by the love of pleasure or the love of power: for them, money is simply a means to gain their real ends. A distinguished ecclesiastic of my acquaintance told a younger churchman, ‘You may be a powerful priest, or you may be a wealthy priest; you can’t be both.’ His advice was to aim at power (as he himself had successfully done) rather than wealth. Whether either power or wealth is a proper aim in life for a servant of Christ is another question (both the Lord himself and his servant Paul answer it clearly more than once). The point at present is that for some people the love of power is the root of all evil; if the example of Adolf Hitler comes to mind, that is but one out of many. Many versions, including the RSV (quoted above), say that ‘the love of money is the root of all evils’, but that is not what Paul says. What he says is well expressed by J. N. D. Kelly: ‘For evils of every kind are rooted in the love of money.’ Where the love of money is the driving force in a person’s life, it may lead to all sorts of evil; Christians are therefore put on their guard against it. ‘You cannot serve God and Mammon,’ said our Lord; he was not exaggerating when he insisted that it was hard for those who had riches to enter the kingdom of God, for he knew that it is natural for those who have riches to trust in them rather than in God (Mark 10:23–27; Luke 16:13).

6. ‘Cretans are always liars’ (Tit. 1:12).

The point of this quotation was that the man who gave the Cretans such an unflattering characterization was himself a Cretan (why then, it might be asked, should this statement of his be believed?). The psalmist cast his net more widely and included the whole human race in the same condemnation: ‘all men are liars’, he said (Ps. 116:6)—but that was admittedly in his haste (AV). ‘Weel, Dawit,’ apostrophized the Scots minister, as he raised his eyes from the page after reading these words: ‘if ye had lived in this parish, ye could have said it at your leisure!’ The author of the words quoted is said to have been one Ephimenides, who berated his fellow-Cretans because they took visitors to see the tomb of Zeus, the supreme god. We may be sure that Paul was not interested in the origin of the quotation: he was more concerned to put Titus on his guard against certain national traits with which he might have to cope as he carried out his pastoral ministry in Crete.

But the origin of the quotation is interesting for another reason. It is said to be taken from a poem which Ephimenides addressed to the supreme deity; in one quatrain the poet depletes the Cretans’ folly in imagining that Zeus was dead and buried:

‘They fashioned a tomb for thee,
A flag and an oil-cup—
The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies—
But thou art not dead; for ever thou art alive and risen.

For in thee we live and move and have our being.

The second line of this quatrain is quoted here, in Tit. 1:12, but it will be quickly recognized that the fourth line is quoted in Acts 17:28—with the replacement of the second person singular (‘in thee’) by the third (‘in him’), since Paul is not addressing Zeus but telling the court of the Areopagites at Athens about the God of revelation, who is the creator and sustainer of all, and applying to him the language that Ephimenides used of Zeus.

What conclusion should be drawn from the quotation, in texts ascribed to Paul, of two lines from the same context? With more particular refer-
ence to Paul's Athenian speech, James Hope Moulton wrote in the early years of this century: 'when we find the Lukan Paul quoting Epimenides (Acts 17:28a), and the Paul of the Pastorals citing the very same context (Tit. 1:12) ... we may at least remark that the speech is very subtly concocted.' 'Very subtly concocted', he meant, if it was not spoken by Paul but composed by another; his own suggestion was that Luke's report of the speech was written 'from full notes, given him not long after by his master'—in other words, that Paul was acquainted with the quatrain and quoted from it himself in both places.

**Questions for group study**

1. Consider the contribution that books can make to an all-round Christian life.
2. Is it advisable to take a quotation from a non-Christian source and apply it in a Christian sense?
3. Am I beguiled by the love of money?