

"A GOOD MINISTER OF JESUS CHRIST"

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(I. Timothy 4:6)

(Extract from an address delivered at Seattle, Wash., by vote of the Federation of Ministers, inter-denominational.)

I have promised to speak this morning on the ministry of these times. To do this I will need an authority higher than any I have of my own. And higher, too, than either "modernist" or "traditionalist" of merely human dictum. It cannot be but that the Scriptures will furnish precept and precedent for that peculiar ministry with which the Gospel was to be propagated both in all nations and in all generations. Of course, I speak not of methods. These are malleable rather than cast. But I speak of principles, which must be second only to truth itself in endurance, and applicable as the gospel "Whosoever" to all times and conditions.

I turn therefore to one who claims to have been a divinely made minister who hesitates not to declare himself "a master-builder" and who thus speaks of himself as having been "made an able minister of the New Testament." One, too, to whom a fellow apostle accredits inspiration and classes his writings with the "other Scriptures."

Now, that this man of God, who received not his Gospel at the hands of the college of the apostles, but had direct revelation himself of the Son of God, who was ever conscious of being an "apostle, a preacher, a teacher" by divine appointment and qualification, who realized he had been made an "able minister," and ranked among ministers as a "master-builder," should have been the dean of a (divinely instituted) school of theology and leave to the church not only a register of the principles and practices of his own ministries in his second epistle to the Corinthians, but also a system of ministerial training in his epistles to Titus and Timothy is not strange. It would be strange if it were otherwise, strange from either the viewpoint of the human or of the divine in the matter of the Gospel ministry. We take it that as to principles, the precedent and the principles of the Pauline ministry are like the pattern shown to Moses in the mount for the tabernacle, God's own appointed and approved plan for our ministry of the Gospel of His Son.

And for the subject before us we want now to lay down two propositions and our message shall proceed in the assumption of these:

I. There is nothing new in these times.

II. There is nothing old in the Gospel.

Of course, I mean in the first, nothing essentially new; and in the second that there is nothing worn out in the Gospel, nor in the divine method for its ministrations.

As to the former statement, however, I must modify or qualify, to the extent of saying that those things we are to note from the Word are tremendously accentuated, even aggravated in our day, and their progress towards culmination and climacteric manifestation seem awfully accelerated. But essentially they are the same

as what mark, and are to mark, all times in the Christian era, and which are ever taken cognizance of as to the very times in which Timothy himself was to minister. Perhaps this one title in II. Timothy 3:1 will serve as a caption for them all:

Perilous Times.

And I suppose by this would be meant times of peril to the world at large, to the church as well, and even to the ministry in particular.

And under this caption we will find three sub-headings which will well picture and include all that marks our own times. These are:

1. Times of gross worldliness.
2. Times of church corruption.
3. Times of much apostasy.

The first of these is thus described in the paragraph from which our caption is taken. We read it in order that its identification with our own times, or of this day with that, may appear as self evident.

"Men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemous, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, etc., etc., lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof." This, we submit, is the exact condition of the world about us today in an accented and accelerated degree, and whatever ministry we shall find Paul prescribed for Timothy must, in an intensified measure, be the ministry for our own time.

And, secondly, in the Fourth chapter, we shall find the world's encroachment upon the church thus described: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts will heap to themselves teachers having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables." And some of these teachers and their teachings are designated by name in the Second chapter, thus: "Of whom is Hymeneus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection has passed already." And notwithstanding these "overthrow the faith of some" and "their word doth eat as a canker," and "increase unto more ungodliness" the worldly element now near dominant in the church succeed in displacing the teachers of the truth of Christ while such philosophers as these two men, teaching like error as that "the coming Christ is past already; and that there is now no need of regeneration if only our boys and girls are brought up in the activities of Christian service, etc. I say there is nothing essentially different in either the philosophy or the truth rejection of our day from that of Hymeneus and Philetus, save only in the degree of arrogance and the measure of dominance of these worldly manipulators of church affairs. And whatever was the ministry for their times must be the ministry for our times, only with still more courage and Holy Ghost power.

Thirdly, from I. Timothy 4th Chapter we read what is said of apostasy. "The Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils." Their errors, being

coated with truth, they "Speak lies in hypocrisy." Their practices, leading to licentiousness, they in various ways "forbid to marry," by countenancing divorce on other than Scriptural grounds, by sun-dering the marriage bond on ecclesiastical or cult considerations, by making way for free love by denying the divine institution of marriage, as well as by enjoying in some extreme cases, vows of celibacy which Christ refused to incorporate into His requirements. In a word the doctrines of devils which devastate church relations soon defile and destroy home relations as well. The harem rather than the home is the ultimate outcome of not only Mormonism but many more insinuating sophistries which would weaken the inspired word of an apostle concerning the place of woman in the home and in the church. But the germ, at least, of every such fanaticism and heresy was to be grappled with by Timothy. So that the ministry for his time must be the ministry for ours.

And we shall find three, perhaps four, explicit directions concerning this ministry.

I.

A Ministry of Prayer

Mark, I do not exactly say a praying ministry, but a ministry of prayer. One that effects things in the condition of the world, in the state of the church and in the hearts of men by prayer, that actually ministers thus, having power with God to prevail.

See, then, I Timothy, second chapter: "I exhort, therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; . . . that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life (and this ought to settle the question as to whether war, like peace, is favorable to godliness and honesty). For this (prayer and what is prayed for) is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." Now, brethren, the time we spend at banquets, or even at committee meetings will neither atone for nor substitute in the ministry of these times for the time we take from intercession. Every generation must furnish its own witnesses of the supernatural in Christianity. And this it can do by the ministry of prayer.

But it must be:

II.

A Ministry of Preaching.

I know there is a sense in which we have come to call a whole lot of things preaching which, however, are not preaching. There is, of course, a ministry in music—provided it be under the unction of the Holy Spirit and for the glory of God rather than the fame of the artist. There is a ministry in flowers, in pictures and in Nature all about us, and there is a blessed ministry in a holy life; but not even these (much less the others) is preaching in a proper sense, that sense for which God has removed the wisdom of the world, whether in literature, science, philosophy, or professor's classes and lectures and has approved preaching

(Continued on Page 7)