

THE UNSHAKEN FOUNDATION

II Timothy 2:11-19

"Faithful is the saying" or "trustworthy is the word" is the opening statement of this paragraph. The word to which reference is made here is in the previous verse which speaks of the eternal glories of those who are saved, which stimulate to endurance of suffering for the sake of the gospel of Christ. It is clear that Christianity deals with the past, which, for the believer, is accounted for most wonderfully. It also deals with the present, bringing the believer all he needs for the problems, perplexities, perils and possibilities of his everyday life. But let us never forget that it also guarantees to him a golden future.

This faithful saying or trustworthy word is in two parts: positive and negative. "For if we died together with him, we shall also live with him." The construction here assumes the condition to be an actuality. The word "died" is in the aorist tense, indicating an act in the past. When did this happen? Potentially, when Christ died for sin at Calvary; experimentally, when we were identified with Him by faith. When Christ died on Calvary, God identified us with Him, and accounted His death as our death. By faith this identification is appropriated by believers. By this identification with Christ, His resurrection meant new life for us as well. This new life is our present possession and it is eternal, eventually to be enjoyed in His presence forever. If we indeed shared the benefit of His death by putting our faith in Him, we shall live by means of Him who is the source and sustainer of life, and we shall share in His unending life, for the Word of God says, "We shall also live with him."

Then follows the negative side of this trustworthy saying, "If we shall deny him, he also will deny us." Can Christians deny the Lord? Yes! Becoming a Christian does not remove us from the temptation of Satan to deny Christ, or the possibility of yielding to it. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Corinthians 10:12). May God forbid that any of us shall deny Him! Not long after this letter was written the Roman authorities demanded that Christians deny their Lord or die, but multitudes refused to treat their Saviour in such a heartless manner. Failure to suffer any hardship for Christ is the equivalent of a denial of Him. If any of us shall deny Him in the future, the consequence of our doing so is very clear for Christ said, "But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 10:33). If we suffer for Christ, as some Christians will be called to do, "we shall also reign with him." All who are truly loyal to Christ here, whether that loyalty incurs suffering or not, will reign with Him hereafter.

"If we are faithless, he abideth faithful; to deny himself he is not able." The faithlessness mentioned here is not some violent act of heresy or apostasy, whereby a person repudiates the Christian faith, but it is that unfaithfulness which characterizes each Christian life so frequently. "If we are faithless, he abideth faithful; for he cannot deny himself." Even though our faith may waver, and we may distrust the interest, care and power of our Lord, He ever abides faithful, for He cannot be untrue to Himself. Because His very nature is faithfulness to the right, He will deny the denier rather than His own nature. He will never prove false to His own character. He will never do wrong in order to favor a professing follower. He will never be unrighteous in His faithfulness. In all His words and actions He will be perfectly consistent. There is no fickleness in Him. What He has ever been, He always will be. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). We can always depend on Him, regardless of how untrustworthy we may be.

If, from sheer physical weakness, or from the extreme pressure of untoward circumstances, or from the insidious oncoming of doubt, or from any other cause, you find your faith faltering or failing, turn away from yourself and depend on Him Who will never falter nor change. "He abideth faithful," even though you may be so faithless as to disbelieve Him. Oh, the joy of having such an unswerving Friend and loving Master!

Paul had stood for the genuine Christian teaching and he urged Timothy to follow his example in the face of the rising heresies. He challenged him to be strong in the endurance of his hardships and to be brave in all of his sufferings. He charged Timothy to put the members of his church at Ephesus, over whom he had been placed, in remembrance of those great and solemn truths which were recorded in verses eleven to thirteen. These truths may be summarized briefly in the words: "Fellowship with Christ in suffering will be followed by fellowship with Him in glory."

Timothy was advised not to waste his time in arguing with the false teachers. It was his duty to refrain from waging thoroughly useless word-battles. Wisdom demanded that he should even refuse, politely but definitely, to bother with the well-known inquiries that would result in such word-battles. Such inquiries and their resultant word-battles are always foolish and futile. Furthermore, Timothy was instructed to charge his fellow-workers, as if the Lord were looking into their very faces, that they were not to strive or be contentious over mere words.

God's children are taught to avoid trifling heretical speculations and useless religious disputes. Such speculations are senseless, the kind of investigations which one associates with morons. They are the work of ignorant men. The person who has been properly educated in God's redemptive truth is able to distinguish between the worthwhile and the worthless, and wisely refuses to participate in useless inquiries, speculations, discussions or disputes that result in the loss of temper and breed or generate quarrels. Religious arguments are foolish, profitless and often injurious. They frequently subvert, undermine or overthrow the faith of those who listen to them. I have never known of one to result in the salvation of a soul or the advancement of the cause of Christ. Some egotistic but silly preachers will utter false teachings with the intention of refuting them, but in doing so they succeed only in raising doubts which otherwise most of his hearers never would have entertained. Strong characters and victorious Christian lives are not built by speculations, theories and doubts, but by the positive and constructive teachings of the Word of God.

If Timothy succeeded in checking the inroads of false teaching, he would do so most effectively by showing in his own person what a true teacher ought to be. God's workman must enforce his teaching by his own example always. The most effective refutation of error is for the teacher to be the living embodiment of truth, with God's approval upon him. But this is not easy.

Every laborer for God must give diligence to the kind and quality of his work, so that when he meets God's inspection, he will stand the test and be approved, having no need for shame because of faulty workmanship. We must be concerned, as was Paul, that there be no reason for shame in our service for Christ. It made little difference to the Apostle whether men approved or blamed him, but he was greatly concerned to have the approval of the Lord, which is the important thing for every Christian. In writing to the Corinthians he said, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment" (I Corinthians 4:3).

The word which is translated "study" in verse fifteen means "to make haste, endeavor, be eager, exert self or give diligence." The Christian life is not a picnic. Every believer in Christ is rightfully expected to be a worker for Him. Every child of God is admonished to avoid slipshod work. Do your utmost to let others and God see that you are a good and efficient workman.

Anybody is foolish who thinks that he or she can avoid embarrassment and escape shame whose work is inefficient or deceitful. God's Word says, "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully" (Jeremiah 48:10). Naturally shame is the inevitable result when the incompetence and shoddiness of one's work is detected. There can be no worse shame than to prove yourself incompetent in your chosen work. On the other hand, it is a great joy when one has done his work in such a way as to have no need of being ashamed when it is inspected by anybody. Do your work in such a manner that you can submit it for inspection and approval without a blush. Do your best to present yourself to the Lord as "a workman not made ashamed when his work is being inspected."

The particular work in which Timothy was engaged was handling the Word of God, that is proclaiming it and applying it to men's lives. It was his duty, therefore, to "cut in straight lines the word of truth." "Rightly dividing" means "Cutting in straight lines." In striking contrast to the false teachers, Timothy was commanded to be faithful and accurate in dispensing the word of truth. Nothing is more dishonorable and pitiable than to be a teacher of error, and nobody can be of such noble and continuous service in the Master's cause as an intelligent and loyal exponent of His truth.

Handling aright the word of truth is the picture of a precious treasure held in human hands. Those hands are to put that treasure to its proper use, and in the process be very careful not to soil, abuse or mutilate it. If a careless workman handles this treasure in such a way as to do harm to it, he will be ashamed when his Master calls him to account for his sin. Strive zealously that such embarrassment may not come to you when you finish your task and stand before Christ for inspection and judgment. Be careful and faithful in the discharge of your duties so that when you finish your job and go into His presence you may hear the welcome plaudit, "Well done, good and faithful servant.....enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matthew 25:21).

Verse sixteen indicates that already there were false teachers in the church at Ephesus. Their teachings were described as "profane and vain babblings." This word "babblings" means "baby-talk." What a pity that so many, who have great learning in other realms, are simply given to the discussion of minor things or empty baby-talk in spiritual matters. When people turn from the Word of God to human theories, which are just profane and vain babblings, they always advance to doctrinal error and increased ungodliness. False teaching inevitably results in the growth of ungodliness, for creed and conduct are inseparable.

Christians must shun the corrupting influence of false teaching and separate themselves from what is wrong in belief and sinful in practice. Wise indeed is the admonition to shun such teaching, or to turn one's self about for the purpose of avoiding it.

The evil influence of false teachers becomes more powerful and dangerous with the passing of time. God's Word teaches that "their word will eat as doth agangrene." This is certainly a very striking figure of speech. Gangrene is a disease in which bacteria enter a wound on the human body and destroy the flesh. This infection is poisonous, spreading and dangerous. So, we are told that false teaching eats its way into a life and character like deadly gangrene. When false teachers enter a church their corrupting doctrines will spread like gangrene does in the human body, finding grazing ground among the unspiritual and the unsuspecting in the congregation. The contamination which infects teachers naturally spreads to others who hear them.

Two of the more prominent false teachers were Hymenaeus and Philetus. The former had been excluded from the church at Ephesus, but he had continued to carry on his mischievous work. The latter is not mentioned elsewhere in the Scriptures. Apparently they taught that a spiritual rebirth, which had already taken place, was the only resurrection. It is not surprising that the effect of their teaching was to undermine

the faith of some. Of course, when their faith was weakened they became more loose in their living. If the teaching of these self-righteous and conceited ringleaders were allowed to go unchecked, it would spread and play havoc with many others. Such teaching would destroy all hope of meeting again the loved ones who had died, and of reigning with Christ in glory. Because these false teachers had missed the mark regarding the truth, wisdom demanded that they be avoided by those who knew the Lord and loved Him.

That these men denied a future resurrection showed the extent of their error, for this is a basic element of the Christian faith. By treating the subject of the resurrection as a spiritual experience only, these teachers had hoped to dispose of it. No wonder that they undermined and destroyed the faith of some, since Christianity without a resurrection ceases to be a living faith. God wants His children to stand off or to stay away from all false doctrines because they eat and spread like gangrene.

In contrast to the insecurity of false teachings, the stability of Christian doctrine is brought into focus in verse nineteen. Here the emphasis is placed on the immovable character of God's solid foundation, even in the face of such defection as the false teachers represent. Even though the faith of some may be shaken by false teachings, God has laid a firm foundation and it still stands. "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure." As we face the future much of our uncertainty can be dissipated if we will accept the implications of this fundamental truth. God is a sure fact. His purposes for the world are everlasting. His foundation cannot be shaken by what individuals, or groups, or nations may do. The unforeseen will lose its terror when we have the blessed assurance that "the foundation of God standeth sure."

Our faith and assurance that there is a divine foundation which undergirds all of life enable us to see life in perspective. As we face the unknown future, one of our greatest needs is faith in God. Faith in God and in His ability to shape and use us is the key to a fuller and richer life for each of us.

God will never ask us to do anything that He will not enable us to do. If our burdens seem heavy, we still may be confident that our inner resources will prove sufficient for our needs. Faith in God makes us certain that we shall be the recipients of that kind of strength. Day by day strength will be given us for our needs if we will accept the basic truth that "the foundation of God standeth sure." We can live triumphantly when we use the resources which He provides for us. "As your days so shall your strength be."