

2 Timothy 4:17 (Alexander Hume Rule) 146912

Strength and Courage: Service and Conflict, Strength and Courage: Service and Conflict Require It (4:17)

Nothing could be plainer to one conversant with Scripture than that the gospel is antagonistic to all the principles of this world, and that, carrying with it as it does the authority of God, it must call forth the resistance of Satan and of men in alienation from God. And this necessarily puts the gospel in the place of conflict, and entails suffering in this world on those who will stand with and for the truth of the gospel. Paul was "the prisoner of the Lord," and suffered many and varied afflictions and persecutions for the sake of the gospel which he preached as an ambassador of Christ. And so has it ever been when any have stood for God and His truth in this evil world of which Satan is the prince and god.

Man has fallen under Satan's power, and is in a state of complete alienation from God. The cross was the full witness of this. "This is the heir," they said; "come, let us kill him and possess his inheritance." Matt. 21:38; N. Trans. Man has fallen under the power of one who has usurped the place of God in this world; and so whenever God has been pleased to assert His rights in this world, or to exercise His sovereign prerogatives, man has resisted; as Stephen said, "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost." Pharaoh, Amalek, the Canaanites, all resisted Jehovah in the fulfillment of His purposes as to Israel. And even the Israelites forsook their own Deliverer; and when He sent them prophets, they beat, and stoned, and killed them; and when He sent His Son, they nailed Him to the cross. Jews and Gentiles united in putting to death Jesus the Son of God; and the full character of man's wickedness was thus manifested.

But it was by "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" that He was delivered; and by His death, redemption for guilty man was accomplished. In His death the foundation of eternal salvation was laid, and the ground for the display of greater and higher glories than those of the kingdom of Israel. God raised up Jesus from the dead, and exalted Him to His own right hand, and sent down the Holy Ghost to gather out from Jews and Gentiles a people to His name.

This work is being accomplished through the preaching of the gospel. But it is the gospel preached in the name of the despised and rejected Jesus, and in the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, that so runs counter to all that is in the natural heart of man, and calls forth resistance from both man and Satan.

The instruments God uses are only poor, weak, defenseless creatures without any carnal weapons to carry on their warfare. Yet the charge was given them, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Mark 16:15.

It is easy to see that for the carrying out of this charge some unseen strength was needed. We see, for example, a few fishermen preaching the gospel, and thousands bowing to the authority of that name which they preached, while the world power sought to silence them and stop their work. Yet undismayed these poor, despised fishermen go on with their work. What was the secret? God was with them. The rulers lay their hands on them and put them in the common prison, and the next morning they are found again standing in the temple and preaching to the people "all the words of this life." God was with them, and bonds and prison bars were nothing to Him if He saw fit to exercise His power. And even though the apostles might be bound, the gospel could not be bound. It was when bound with a chain that Paul preached the gospel before kings and rulers; and even when in the lion's mouth, he was strengthened so that by him the preaching might be fully known, and all the Gentiles hear. And he was delivered out of the mouth of the lion (2 Tim. 4:17). Here was true strength and real courage, but it was strength in the midst of utter weakness, and courage when there was no hope in human resources.

It was the power of God. The creature instruments were in communion with Him, and hence courage which nothing could daunt filled their hearts. It was all of God who wrought in them effectually for the carrying out of His purposes.

There are many instances given us in the Word of God in which we see the display of this power and courage in carrying out the will of God. But the first chapter of Joshua is important as giving us the conditions governing these things. Three times over the Lord exhorts Joshua in that chapter to "be strong and of a good courage." There was the work to be done, the principle on which it was to be done, and the ground of strength and courage for it.

The work to be done was the dividing of the land among the tribes of Israel. "Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swore unto their fathers to give them." The land to be divided was a land in which there were nations mightier than Israel—a land of "giants," and "chariots of iron," and cities great and "fenced up to heaven." These nations must be overcome in order to divide the land, and for this great work strength and courage were needed.

Obedience was the principle on which this work was to be carried on, and the condition of success. "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses My servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then

thou shalt have good success."

Here we can see there was no way to succeed but by obedience. Joshua was not to turn from the law to the right hand or the left. The words of the law were not to depart out of his mouth: he was to meditate upon them day and night; and the result would be a prosperous way and good success.

The importance of this cannot be overestimated. If we have to do with God, His will must be everything. It is His to command; it is ours to obey. We may say we are not under the law as Israel was, which is quite true, but we are none the less called to obey. God has indeed revealed Himself to us in grace, giving His beloved Son, and in Him all blessing; and by faith we partake of the benefits; but while the blessing is by grace and through faith, it also commands the obedience of the heart.

Paul, as an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, received grace and apostleship "for obedience of faith among all the nations" (N. Trans.), for Christ's name; and the mystery kept secret since the world began was also "made known to all nations for the obedience of faith." There is indeed no other way of going on with God. Our blessing is inseparably bound up with lowly submission to His will.

Now God has made known His will to us in His Word. His will, His purposes, His counsels, are all unfolded there. And if we would know His will, and be obedient, we must attend to His Word. The Lord said to Israel: "Therefore shall ye lay up these My words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the doorposts of thine house, and upon thy gates." Deut. 11:18-20.

Such were God's commands to Israel. And if the words of the law had such importance for Israel -if those words were to fill their hearts, and occupy their thoughts day and night, in the house and by the way, lying down and rising up—if Joshua was not to turn from the words of the law, to the right hand or to the left, but to have them in his mouth, and meditate upon them both night and day, in order to prosper and be successful—how much more ought the revelation God has given us to command the obedience of our hearts, since our whole blessing is bound up in this revelation! It is in the reception of the truth, and as the truth forms the heart and the conscience, that we receive and enjoy blessing. God's Word is bread to the soul, as it is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." It is thus that we grow spiritually, and learn God's mind so that we may do His will and have communion with Him. In this way the life, ways, actions, words, motives, desires, and affections of God's people are formed, and in a practical way become a testimony to the truth and grace of God. And God will manifest Himself with and for those who are thus practically governed by His Word.

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