

# THE PRACTICAL POWER OF OUR HOPE

By the Rev. Dr. Bullinger.

*(At the Liverpool Conference, Nov, 1894.)<sup>1</sup>*

The return of our Lord from heaven and the hope we have in Him is the most practical subject in the Word of God. We know that those who hold this hope are looked upon, by those who are strangers to it, as being fanatics who have got hold of something which is purely imaginary, and something that we could do very well without. But I have a list of a hundred precepts taken out of the New Testament, each one of which is connected with this most blessed hope. One might safely say that there is scarcely a duty or a responsibility connected with Christian living that is not immediately linked on to, and thus bound up with, the hope of our Lord's return. Just take an example. Read Colossians iii. 4. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory. Mortify, **THEREFORE**, your members which are upon the earth." In Cor. xv. 54, we read, **THEREFORE**, my beloved brethren,—seeing we have such a blessed hope; seeing that we have been let into this wonderful, glorious secret—be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

There are some things which are objects of faith, and some which are objects of hope, and some which are objects of knowledge; and we do not hope that our labour in connection with this Conference will not be "in vain." We do not even believe it. We know it. "Knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

It is this blessed hope, dear friends, that God has linked on to holiness of life. This is His own plan for securing it. We know that man always thinks he can improve on God's methods, and His own people are not altogether innocent in this matter. So many of God's dear children tell us that they have got a better plan for securing holiness of life. They tell us that their plan is faith—that by some "act of faith" we have got to do something to accomplish some change in our lives, etc. They must pardon me if I say that I prefer God's plan. He has linked our walk not to faith, but to hope. Hope is the secret of holiness of life, and not faith. "He that hath this hope set on Him—on Christ—purifieth himself, even as He is pure." We have God's word for it. This hope is a guarantee of purity of life; it is an effectual preservative against all down-gradism. I have never yet seen a down-grader who was looking for the coming of Christ from heaven, and I have never seen one on a platform where this subject was the theme for consideration. There is no room for him on such a platform, and he would be out of place there.

This truth, above all others, is "truth for the times." What are the times? They are "perilous times." Yet we are exhorted on all hands to move with the times. But, dear friends, they are "perilous times;" and, therefore, our movement will be perilous, if we move with perilous times. The end of perilous times is judgment, and if we move with them we are moving on to the judgment, too.

I want to take you to a precept, a charge—a solemn, practical charge—which is linked on this blessed hope. It is in 2 Tim. iv. 1: "I charge thee, **THEREFORE**." Note the word, "therefore." It is important, for "every word of God is pure." Why is the word "therefore" put here? Look at the previous chapter, and you will see the reason. It is because the Word of God is inspired, God-breathed, and is able to fit a man for every emergency of life. "I charge thee, **THEREFORE**, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall

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<sup>1</sup> Things to Come, Vol. 2, Aug. 1895; pg. 31

judge the quick and the dead, at his appearing, and his kingdom, Preach the Word."This is a very solemn charge. You would hardly think it necessary to introduce so simple a precept with so solemn a charge! Is not preaching the Word that which every minister professes to do? Then, why this very solemn charge? Because here we are told one of the secrets of these "perilous times," written over eighteen hundred years ago. We read this secret in the third verse: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine." Are not these the days, dear friends? What are those who ought to preach the Word doing? They are at their wits' end searching for something that men will endure. But, in face of these things, we must heed this solemn charge, and "preach the Word." Though men will not have it, we are to "preach the Word." This solemn charge is given us in the presence of the Judge, of Him who is to judge the quick and the dead. Notice the eighth verse of this chapter. "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing." No wonder, then, that simple as this charge is, it requires to be hedged in with the thought of judgment (v. 1 and v. 8), and to be introduced with such awful solemnity. No wonder that we are brought into the presence of the Judge to hear this charge, when there is everything in us and around us to cause us to depart from this simple path of duty. "Preach the Word, for the time will come when men will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears."

Look at 2 Tim. iv. in the light of the whole of these two epistles. No one can read these epistles carefully without being aware that when he passes from the first to the second he is breathing a different atmosphere. In the first epistle the Church is seen in its rule, and Timothy is instructed as to his duty in the house of God, as to the duties of its officers—their qualifications, etc. But the moment we open the second epistle we have quite a different scene before us. The Church is seen in its ruin. The prophetic vision takes us on to the latter times, and we are shown what is to be their character, and what are the successive steps in the downward course.

In chap. i. 15, he says, "This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be

TURNED AWAY FROM ME."

That must have been a very sad experience in the life of Paul—to have all those who ought to have stood by him to turn away from him—yet he knew of One who would never turn away from him. In the 12th verse he says "I know WHOM I have believed." When man turns away from him, it throws him upon God. "I know whom I have believed." He does not say, as it is often quoted, "I know in whom I have believed." No! He says, "I know Him." I believe what He says. This is our resource. The unfeigned faith, referred to in the 5th verse, is what we need. In these days, when men turn away from us, as they will turn away, the nearer we keep to the Lord, nothing will stand us in any stead but unfeigned faith in the living God.

In the second chapter you have described another step in this down-grade course. In the 18th verse we read, "Who,

CONCERNING THE TRUTH HAVE ERRED,

saying: the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His. And let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

In the third chapter we come to a lower step in the character of these last days. In the 8th verse we read, "Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these

## RESIST THE TRUTH."

It is in this connection that we have that important passage (2 Tim. iii. 16) introduced concerning the inspiration of all Scripture, telling us, if we have ears to hear, that when men "resist the truth," our only resource, our only defence, is the Word of Truth. This is the lesson which we learn from the place where this passage occurs: We are not to trust to our own wisdom in the presence of those who resist, but we are to rely upon "the Sword of the Spirit"—which is the Word of God.

There is still another, a last step in the down-grade movement given us in the fourth chapter. You ask, Can there be anything worse than open resistance of the truth? Yes, far worse! There is some hope for those who "resist." They may be overcome! It is possible that they may be brought into subjection to the truth. Many who, like Saul of Tarsus, resisted the truth, have become its most earnest and zealous advocates. Yes, there is something worse, which gives the solemn character to the end of these last days. We have it in verses 3 and 4: "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine and they shall

## TURN AWAY THEIR EARS FROM THE TRUTH,

and shall be turned unto fables."

What is to be done for men who deliberately turn away their ears from the truth of God, and are satisfied with the fables of man?

Nothing! Humanly speaking their case is hopeless!

But what is God's servant to do?

"Preach the Word" (v. 2). "Do the work of an evangelist" (v. 5).

But men will not endure sound doctrine?—"Preach the Word."

But men "will not endure" it!

Never mind.—"Preach the Word."

Are we not to seek for something they will endure?

No! "Preach the Word," and all the more simply, earnestly, and faithfully because we know that men will not have it.

This, then, is truth for the times. This is truth for the day in which our lot is cast. No wonder that this simple command, which is for the most part unheeded, is introduced by so solemn a charge in v. 1. No wonder it is introduced by a solemn reference to the coming Judge (v. 1). No wonder it is followed and closed by a reference to the coming of the same "righteous Judge" (v. 8).

When those who should "preach the Word" are making it their aim to please the people, and preaching the newspaper philanthropy, temperance, and a social Gospel; when those who should preach "the Gospel of the Grace of God" are preaching to "raise the masses" to a higher social level; when those who should preach of "Judgment to Come," and make sinners "tremble" (Acts xxiv. 25), are at their wits' end to invent new methods for making everything "pleasant" for Poor Sinners' Amusement; when we see multitudes of so-called "pastors" intent on amusing the goats, instead of seeking and feeding Christ's sheep; I say, when we see this to be the character of our times, then we may be sure that judgment is not far off.

Aaron made the golden calf to please the people, but judgment speedily overtook them (Ex. xxxii. 26, 28).

Pilate crucified Christ to please the people (Mark xv. 15), but the Lord in judgment soon destroyed the city and scattered the nation.

Herod, to please the people, slew James, and was proceeding to slay Peter also, when he was smitten by an angel of God—was eaten of worms, and died (Acts xii. 3, 23).

Believe me, dear friends, judgment is not far off—yea, it is even at the door! We are here to-day to witness of it as Noah witnessed; to walk with God as Enoch walked; seeing what manner of persons we ought to be, while we repeat his prophecy in the ears of a worldly church and a religious world, "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints" (Jude 14).

But there is a blessed hope bound up with this fourth and last characteristic of these evil times. It is recorded in v. 8: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them that also love his appearing."