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## "Thyself and the doctrine."

### - A word for the workman.

C. H. Mackintosh.

"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine [or teaching]; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4: 16).

These are solemn and weighty words for all those who labour in the Word and doctrine. They were addressed by the inspired apostle to his beloved son Timothy, and contain most precious instruction for every one who is called of God to minister in the assembly, or to preach the gospel. It is assuredly a very high and holy privilege to be permitted to take part in such a ministry; but it involves a most serious responsibility; and the passage just quoted sets before the workman two deeply important duties — yea, absolutely essential duties, to which he must give his diligent, constant, prayerful attention, if he would be an efficient workman in the Church of God — "a good minister of Jesus Christ." He must take heed to himself; and he must take heed to the teaching.

1. And first, then, let us consider the solemn clause, "*Take heed to thyself.*" We cannot adequately set forth the moral importance of this. It is, of course, important for all Christians; but for the workman pre-eminently so; for to such it is here particularly addressed. He, above all, will need to take heed to himself. He must guard the state of his heart, the state of his conscience, his whole inward man. He must keep himself pure. His thoughts, his affections, his spirit, his temper, his tongue, must all be kept under the holy control of the Spirit and Word of God. He must wear the girdle of truth and the breastplate of righteousness. His moral condition and his practical walk must answer to the truth ministered, else the enemy will most assuredly get an advantage over him.

The teacher ought to be the living exponent of what he teaches. At least this should be his honest, earnest, constant aim. He should ever keep this holy standard before "the eyes of his heart." Alas, the best will fail and come short; but where the heart is true, the conscience tender, and the fear of God and the love of Christ have their due place, the workman will never be satisfied with anything short of the divine standard for his inward state and his outward walk. It will ever be his earnest desire to exhibit the practical effect of his teaching, and to be "an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4: 12). With this he should ever remember that "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants, for Jesus' sake."

We must never for a moment lose sight of the weighty moral fact that the teacher ought to *live* the truth which he teaches. It is morally dangerous, in the extreme, for a man to teach in public what he does not live in private — dangerous for himself, most damaging to the testimony, and injurious to those with whom he has to do. What can be more deplorable or humiliating than for a man to be characterised by contradicting in his personal history and in his domestic life the truth which he utters in the public assembly? It is simply fearful, and must inevitably lead to the most disastrous results.

Hence, then, may it be the deep-seated, earnest purpose and aim of all those who minister in the Word and doctrine to feed upon the precious truth of God; to make it their own; to live and move and have their being in the very atmosphere of it; to have the inward man strengthened and formed by it; to have it dwelling richly in them, that thus it may flow out in living power, savour, unction and fullness to others.

It is a very poor, yea, a very dangerous thing to sit down to the Word of God as a mere student, for the

purpose of preparing lectures or sermons for other people. Nothing can be more deadening or withering to the soul. Mere intellectual traffic in the truth of God, storing up certain doctrines, views and principles in the memory, and giving them out with a certain fluency of speech, is at once deluding and demoralising. We may be drawing water for other people, and all the while be like rusty pipes ourselves. How miserable this is! "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and *drink*," said our blessed Lord. He did not say "*draw*." The true spring and power of all ministry in the Church will ever be found in drinking for our own souls, not in drawing for others. "He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." We must abide close to the eternal fountain, the heart of Christ; drink deeply, drink continually. Thus our own souls shall be refreshed and enriched; rivers shall flow for the refreshment of others, and streams of praise ascend to the throne and to the heart of God by Jesus Christ. This is Christian ministry — yea, this is Christianity; all else is utterly worthless.

2. We shall now dwell for a few moments on the second point in our subject, namely, the doctrine, or teaching — for such is the true force of the original word. And oh, how much is involved in this! "Take heed to the teaching." Solemn admonition! What care is needed! What holy watchfulness! What earnest, prayerful, constant waiting upon God for the right thing to say, and the right way to say it! God only knows the state and the need of souls. He knows their capacity. We do not. We may be offering "strong meat" to those who can only bear "milk," and thus do positive mischief. "If any man speak, let him speak as oracles of God." He does not say, *according* to the oracles of God." A man may rise and speak for an hour in the assembly, and every word he says may be in strict accordance with the letter of Scripture, and yet he may not at all speak as an oracle of God — as God's mouthpiece to the people. He may minister truth, but not the needed truth, at the time.

How solemn is all this! How it makes us feel the seriousness of the apostle's admonition, "Take heed to the teaching"! How it sets before us the urgent need of self-emptied dependence upon the power and guidance of the Holy Ghost! Here lies the precious secret of all effective ministry, whether oral or written. We may talk for hours, and write volumes, — and talk and write nothing unscriptural, — but if it be not in the power of the Spirit, our words will prove but as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, and our volumes as so much waste paper. We want to lie much at the Master's feet, to drink deeply into His Spirit, to be in fellowship with His heart of love for the precious lambs and sheep of His flock. Then shall we be in a condition of soul to give the portion of meat in due season.

He alone knows exactly what His beloved people really need at all times. We may perhaps feel deeply interested in some special line of truth, and we may judge it to be the right thing for the assembly; but this might be quite a mistake. It is not the truth which interests us, but the truth which the assembly needs, that should be given out; and for this we should ever wait upon our gracious Lord. We should look simply and earnestly to Him, and say, "Lord, what wouldest Thou have me to say to Thy beloved people? Give me the suited message for them." Then would He use us as His channels; and the truth would flow down from His loving heart into our hearts, and forth from us, in the power of His Spirit, into the hearts of His people.

Oh that it were thus with all who speak and write for the Church of God! What results we might look for! — what power! — what manifest progress in the divine life! The true interests of the flock of Christ would then be thought of in all that was spoken or written. Nothing equivocal, nothing strange or startling, would then be sent forth. Nothing but what is sound and seasonable would flow from the lips or the pen. Sound speech that cannot be condemned, that which is good for the use of edifying, would alone be sent forth.

May every beloved workman throughout the length and breadth of the Church of God take home to himself the apostolic admonition, "Take heed to thyself, and to the teaching . . . for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee"!

"Of these things put them in remembrance, testifying earnestly before the Lord, not to have disputes of words, profitable for nothing, to the subversion of the hearers. Strive diligently to present thyself *approved to God*, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Tim. 2: 14-15).