

## THE FIRST EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY.

## CHAPTER III. VERSES 8-15.

IN the eighth verse a much broader term than that of "bishop" is used to denote a church official. The word *διάκονος*, according to Buttmann,<sup>1</sup> signifies one who runs as a messenger, and hence is a servant or minister, generally retaining an honourable sense. The angels "minister" to the Lord (Mark i. 13; the apostles "ministered" the epistle of Christ (2 Cor. iii. 3). In Acts i. 17, 25, the word *διακονία* is used of the apostolic office, and in xii. 25, of the service rendered by Paul and Barnabas.<sup>2</sup> Only in Phil. i. 1, and in the Pastoral Epistles, is *διάκονος* used of a distinct office, and contrasted with the office of the *ἐπίσκοπος*.

Considerable authorities may be quoted for the supposition that the group of young men, *οἱ νεώτεροι* of Acts v. 6 (*cf.* ver. 10), who performed subordinate duties in the Christian Church at Jerusalem were the prototype of the diaconate.<sup>3</sup> Still, the specific duties which were devolved upon the seven Hellenists differ greatly from the laborious and secular toils of the *Chazan* of the synagogue. The Apostles had, in the first instance, discharged the responsibilities which were devolved upon "the seven." Henceforward they gave themselves to the ministry of the Word. The careers of Stephen and Philip, who were full of the Holy Ghost and prophetic power, shew that the functions of the Seven were somewhat

<sup>1</sup> "Lexilogus," § xl. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Compare also Rom. xiii. 4; xv. 8; Ephes. iii. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Mack, Neander, Vitringa, Olshausen.

elastic, and capable of great development. The early Church writers generally identify the office of the Seven with those of the deacons of this Epistle and of the Epistle to the Philippians. It is probable that "the helps" of 1 Cor. xii. 28, and the "ministration" referred to in Rom. xii. 7, did not materially differ from the diaconate of the Church at Ephesus. We find from Justin Martyr that the deacons carried the eucharistic elements to the communicants, both present and absent, and that they were entrusted with the privilege of preaching and of administering baptism, and of waiting upon the presbyter or bishop.

We cannot learn much from the injunctions of St. Paul as to their ecclesiastical functions; but the lesson is obvious, that high moral character was demanded in all who took any part, however humble, in the service of the Church.

Like the presbyters, deacons are to be *worthy of reverence, not double-tongued*, saying one thing to one person and another to another; *not given up to* (not enslaved by—see Titus ii. 3) *much wine*. There is no material difference between this statement and the counsel by which bishops are warned in the former part of the Chapter. They are not to be *greedy of base gain*, lest they misappropriate any of the funds of the Church; and then there follows a great injunction—*they are to have, or hold, the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience*. The word "mystery," in classic writers, refers to the politico-religious secrets which were communicated to the initiated. The military oath was said to be the "mystery" of the power of the Romans. It is that which does, or

ought to, withdraw itself from general communication, and which it is sin and folly to disclose. In Biblical usage a mystery frequently connotes a secret concealed from ordinary eyes, but made known by Divine revelation. There were hidden wonders of love and righteousness which had been kept secret, but were now revealed (Rom. xvi. 25 ; 1 Cor. ii. 7). The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven were made known in the parabolic discourses of our Lord, and "the mystery of the faith" was the recognized form of what was at one time concealed, but is now the inheritance of believers. All who believe in what God has unveiled know the mysteries. The mystery of the faith which deacons are to hold in a pure conscience is the glorious secret with which faith was conversant. They are to hold fast what was once concealed but is now the open secret of the kingdom of God.

The "pure conscience" demands that the mystery should not be changed in essence by the way in which it is held or uttered. It should be "*held*," not subscribed to, merely for the sake of peace, or for "the greater glory of God." It is not to be verbally maintained when reason or heart fail to endorse it, but it is to be "*held*" in an undefiled and vigorous conscience.

*Verse 10.*—*And let these, moreover,<sup>1</sup> be tried,<sup>2</sup> first by the Church, and then, if no charge be laid against*

<sup>1</sup> See Ellicott's valuable Note on *καὶ—δέ*, in which, by giving both particles their full force, an "adjunctive character" emerges out of their coalition.

<sup>2</sup> *Cf.* art. "Docimasia," in "Smith's Dictionary of Antiquities."

*them, let them act the part of a deacon.* The participle here expresses the condition under which the action of the principal verb takes place.

In *Verse 11* the Apostle diverges for a moment to the moral fitness required in women deacons, or deaconesses. Luther, Huther, Coray, and Bengel, sustain the interpretation, preferred in the English Version, that the Apostle refers to the wives of deacons. Mack, Beza, and Wiesinger supposed that the "wives" of both bishops and deacons were referred to. The objection to these explanations is, that there is neither article nor pronoun limiting the reference, and that the subject of deacons is resumed in the following verse. Ellicott and Fairbairn sustain the older interpretation. The existence, of these female helpers and servants of the Church is undoubted. In Rom. xvi. 1, St. Paul refers to Phœbe as a deacon; and possibly Euodias and Syntyche at Philippi belonged to the same class. Pliny speaks of "*ancillæ quæ ministræ dicebantur.*" These *ancillæ* suffered greatly in times of persecution. The Order did not cease to exist in the Western Church until the fifth century, and was continued in the Greek Church till the twelfth. The deaconess vanished into the cloister until partially revived in comparatively modern times. The very Epistle which frowns on certain unfeminine services in the Church, shews that there was work of a high order to be done by Christian women. Those who undertake such service ought to be characterized by that same grace of which St. Paul speaks so much. They should *inspire reverence,*

having the halo of purity and sanctity about them; they are *not* to be *slanderers*. *Sobriety* in all their demeanour is expected; and they are to be *faithful*, trustworthy, *in all things*.

In *Verse 12* the deacons are required to have the same qualifications as the bishops. *Let them be husbands of one wife, ruling well their children and their own houses*. The reason given is that *those who have discharged the office of a deacon well, obtain for themselves a good degree, and much boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus*. Jerome, Erasmus, Heydenreich, Cornelius-a-Lapide, Wettstein, Bengel, all suppose by the "good degree" is meant ecclesiastical promotion.<sup>1</sup> If so, the passage would stand alone, and instead of *καλόν* we should have expected *μείζονα*. Rost and Palm say the word *βαθμός* is equivalent to *βάσις*, the material, the standing place of honour. Theodoret translated it, "higher degree of blessedness in the life to come;" and with him Lange practically agrees. Huther, who discusses it at great length, thinks it refers to the respect paid to such in the Church. Probably when coupled with "much boldness in the faith," it involves the sound standing-ground of the earnest worker, all the rich consequences of exalted faith, boldness of approach to God and men, free and exulting energy in the higher ranges of the action and life of the Church. Different degrees of reward are often insisted upon in the New Testament. The parables of the Talents and Pounds are full of assurance on this head. The equality

<sup>1</sup> "Gradum ab humilitate diaconiae ad majora munera in ecclesia."  
—Bengel.

of the saved is never taught. The first may be last and the last first, but there will be both first and last. Those who are saved are saved according to the measure of their faith and capacity. The capacity of some will soon be reached and, we trust, expanded.

*Verses 14, 15.*—There is a pause in the detail of instructions given to prayer-leaders, to women professing godliness, to bishops and deacons. The Apostle looks backward over the previous portions of his letter, and bestows a word of counsel upon his personal friend. *These things (i.e., the foregoing directions) I write (I commit to paper), though I hope to come to thee more quickly*<sup>1</sup> (than the tone of my remarks might have led you to expect). He anticipated a brief absence, but many of the topics on which he had enlarged were urgent, and it was more than possible that the hope of revisiting Ephesus might be disappointed. *But if I should delay, (these directions have been written) in order that thou mightest know how to conduct thyself in the house of God.* It is possible, though not necessary, to translate the clause absolutely, *how men should conduct themselves*; and this interpretation is preferred by Huther and some others, on the ground that, if it were limited to Timothy, the broad reference to the functions of the universal Church would be out of place. The Authorized Version, Luther, De Wette, Mack, Ellicott, Lange, Fairbairn, Davidson, and the majority of Expositors, wisely overlook this difficulty, and simply

<sup>1</sup> "Such comparatives often refer to the suppressed feelings of the subject."—*Ellicott*.

see the Apostle's anxiety with reference to the conduct of Timothy in communicating and enforcing the previous injunctions.

The "house of God" is a phrase borrowed from the Old Testament, where it is applied to the Temple (see also Matt. xxi. 13). In the Epistle to the Hebrews (iii. 3-6) it is descriptive of the covenant people themselves. In this house Moses was a servant, Christ was both Son and Lord, "which house are we, if we hold fast the boldness and glorying of our hope stedfast unto the end." Believers<sup>1</sup> are "the dwelling-place of God." The Christians at Corinth are addressed as the "temple of God."<sup>2</sup> So that it is in complete harmony with Pauline usage that this "house of God" should be further defined, *which is, or (to bring out the full force of the ἡτις) such indeed being, the Church of the living God.* The dwelling-place of God, the house which He fills with his glory, is the assembly of the first-born. That the living God should dwell and walk therein is the ideal of the Christian community. The Holy Ghost promises to do as much for the society which He sanctifies as He does for the individual souls of which it is composed. The sphere of Timothy's activity at Ephesus is representative of the whole of this ideal fellowship. Paul used this grand epithet, "THE LIVING GOD," as an antithesis to the dead gods of Heathendom and the dead abstractions of philosophy.

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<sup>1</sup> Ephes. ii. 22 : κατοικητήριον τοῦ θεοῦ.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 16 : ναὸς θεοῦ ἵστε.