

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	37		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	1 Timothy 6:13-16		
Date:	February 11, 2018 (a.m.)		

CHRIST'S SOVEREIGNTY

“The eternity of God,” according to W. G. T. Shedd, “is his essence as related to duration. It is duration without beginning, without end, and without succession: ‘The eternal God’ (Gen. 21:33); ‘the one that inhabits eternity’ (Isa. 57:13); ‘from eternity to eternity, you are God’ (Ps. 90:2); ‘the king eternal’ (Ps. 102:26-28; Isa. 41:4; 1 Tim. 1:17); ‘the Lord of lords who only has immortality’ (1 Tim. 6:16; ‘I am Alpha and Omega’ (Rev. 1:8).”¹ Elsewhere he writes, “The divine being is of an essence whose spirituality transcends that of all other spirits – human, angelic, or archangelic – even as his immortality transcends that of man or angel. God alone is said to have immortality (1 Tim. 6:16), because his immortality is *a parte ante* as well as *a parte post*. His immortality is eternity. And in the same manner, when the spirituality of God is compared with that of his rational creatures, it might be said that he alone has spirituality.” Contrary to the fanatical claims of self-proclaimed prophets like Joseph Smith and the equally heretical TV evangelists like Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copeland, and a host of others -- as Shedd goes on to point out, “The transcendent nature of divine spirituality is seen in the fact of its being formless and unembodied: ‘No man has seen God at any time’ (John 1:18); ‘you saw no similitude’ (Deut. 4:12).”² Our text underscores the divine attributes that Paul attributes to Christ. The Apostle is directing young Timothy to the One who is the source of his strength – and this is the reason for Paul’s charge.

- I. **THE APOSTOLIC CHARGE.** The charge (*paraggellō* – to instruct by command) is linked with the imperative in v. 12, “fight the good fight,” literally to strive and struggle as in an athletic context. This in turn harkens back to *who* Timothy is – “He is addressed as *man of God*. That is one of the great Old Testament titles. It is a title given to Moses. *Deuteronomy* 33:1 speaks of ‘Moses, the man of God.’ The title of *Psalms* 90 is, ‘A Prayer of Moses the man of God.’ It is a title of the prophets and the messengers of God. God’s messenger to Eli is a man of God (1 *Samuel* 2:27). Samuel is described as a man of God (1 *Samuel* 9:6). Shemaiah, God’s messenger to Rehoboam, is a man of God (1 *Kings* 12:22). John Bunyan in *Pilgrim’s Progress* calls Great-Grace ‘God’s Champion.’ Here is a title of honour. When the charge is given to Timothy, he is not reminded of his own weakness and sin, which might well have reduced him to pessimistic despair; rather he is challenged by the honour which is his, of being God’s man. It is the Christian way, not to depress a man by branding him as a lost and helpless sinner, but rather to uplift him by summoning him to be what he has got it in him to be. The Christian way is not to fling a man’s humiliating past in his face, but to set before him the splendor of his potential future. The very fact that Timothy was addressed as ‘man of God’ would make him square his shoulders and throw his head back as one who has received his commission from the King.”³

- II. THE CONFESSION OF CHRIST.** It is the character and steadfastness of Christ that is displayed before Pilate. Calvin pointed out, “For we are reminded that we are not sitting at Plato’s feet to learn philosophy and to hear him carrying on useless disputations in the shade, but the teaching we profess has been ratified by the death of the Son of God. For Christ made His *confession before Pilate* not in many words but in reality, that is by His voluntary submission to death. For although Christ chose to keep silent before Pilate rather than speak in His own defence, since He had come there already devoted to a certain condemnation, yet in His very silence here was a defence of His teaching no less magnificent than if He had pleaded His case with a loud voice. For He ratified it with his own blood and with the sacrifice of His death better than with any words. He calls this a *good* confession. Socrates also died and yet his death was not satisfying confirmation of the doctrine he held. But when we are told that the blood of God was shed, this is an authentic seal to His teaching that takes all our doubt away. Thus, whenever our hearts waver, let us remember immediately to look to the death of Christ for strength. What cowardice it would be to desert such a leader who goes before us to show us the way.”⁴
- III. CHRIST’S CORONATION.** Christ is called the *blessed* and *only* potentate. “The word *Potentate* (*dunastēs*) in contemporary usage meant a prince or a chieftain as distinct from a king exercising sovereignty in his own power. But the description *only* makes clear that the apostle was not referring to a delegated authority (which in God is inconceivable), but a unique and princely dignity.”⁵
- IV. CHRIST’S CHARACTER.** Paul declares that Christ displays the attributes of God, “Who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light” (NASB). “Two Greek words are commonly translated *immortality* in our English versions of the Bible: *athanasia* and *aphtharsia*. *Athanasia* is found only three times in the New Testament: once in I Timothy 6:16 and twice in I Corinthians 15:53-54. In the first-named passage the word is used to describe God ‘who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see.’ Obviously, immortality here means more than mere endless existence. It means *original* in distinction from *endowed* immortality. In this passage Paul teaches that God, as the fountain of life, is the source of all other immortality. In this sense God alone has immortality; others receive immortality and possess it only in dependence on him. As God has life in himself (John 5:26), so he has immortality in himself.”⁶ Regarding the expression *inapproachable light*, John Owen long ago wrote, “There is nothing more frequently on their lips than those words of Christ, that He is ‘the true light, which lighteth every man which cometh into the world’ (John 1:9). Never are their boasts more clamorous than when they are at this point! Here it is that they fancy wonderful triumphs for themselves and offer the loudest mockeries of their opponents. But the whole contest here lies over the meaning of the words in the text (or, more correctly, over the meaning of *one* word within the text). Let me give, in a few words, an exposition of it. First, Christ is the light in exactly the same sense in which we have shown that God is light. God is light in respect of His essential majesty, sanctity, and glory. So also He is the Source, Author, and Cause of all created light. God is thus light both in essence and effect.”⁷
- V. CHRIST’S COMING.** Timothy is exhorted to keep his eye on the promise of Christ’s glorious return. Christ’s sovereignty is again underscored, “He is the King of his people Israel. ‘Sing praises unto our King’ (Ps. 47:6). He is also ‘the King of all the earth’ and he reigns over the nations (Ps. 47:7-8). This is also clear from the history of which the Bible speaks (Isa. 45:1-8; Dan. 2:36-45). His kingship is universal (Ps. 103:19). It extends over all creation (Ps. 95:3-5). In Jeremiah we read: ‘There is none like unto thee, O Lord! and

thy name is great in might. Who would not fear thee, O King of nations?' (Jer. 10:6-7). All that God does has a purpose. He makes everything serve the coming of his kingdom. Therefore 'all power is given unto [Christ] in heaven and in earth' (Matt. 28:18). In due time 'the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords' will let us behold the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. 'The time is at hand' (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 22:6-21)."⁸

CONCLUSION: Difficult times face young Timothy. How will he handle all the adversity that lay ahead? Does he simply maintain a positive mental attitude? Just look for a silver lining in every dark cloud? Such is the kind of stuff we hear from many quarters today – even in the pulpit! Naïve optimism is a pervasive problem in our churches today. Paul's counsel to Timothy was entirely different. Timothy's comfort and consolation rested entirely on the *truth* of the Gospel. The late Martin Lloyd-Jones rightly said, "There is only one way whereby Timothy can be put right, and that is by reminding him of the whole of the gospel. He has got to come back to the centre of the faith, then everything will be right. But not until then. There is no comfort, no consolation to be offered apart from the truth itself. Comfort, consolation and all other blessings are *derived* from the truth and are never to be obtained apart from it. It may sound harsh to you, but I must say it as I value your soul. You may be turning to Christianity because you want comfort, but the first question I must ask you is this: Are you a Christian? For if you are not a Christian I have no comfort to give you. You will never know comfort until you become a Christian. Your need is not comfort, it is a need of the knowledge of God and the knowledge of Christ. You must start at the centre. The gospel gives its blessings in its own way and there are no short cuts."⁹

ENDNOTES

¹ W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Third Edition, ed. A. W. Gomes, P&R, 2003), p. 153.

² *Ibid.*, p. 279.

³ Wm. Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Letters to Timothy, Titus & Philemon* (The Saint Andrew Press, 1975), p. 134.

⁴ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries X* (Eerdmans, 1964), p. 278.

⁵ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Eerdmans, 1975), p. 116.

⁶ Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and The Future* (Eerdmans, 1979), p. 87.

⁷ John Owen, *Biblical Theology* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria Publication, 1994), p. 850.

⁸ J. Genderen, W. H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics* (P&R, 2008), p. 299.

⁹ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *I Am Not Ashamed: Advice to Timothy* (Baker, 1986), p. 24.