

“Meditate upon these things”

Dennis M Elliott

THE APOSTLE PAUL took great care in preparing Timothy for the responsibilities that lay ahead of him in ecclesial work and organisation, and with this in mind he says: “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:13). It was Paul’s view that this threefold exercise would provide a sound basis for Timothy in the discharge of the duties to which he had been called by his teacher and mentor. In this letter to Timothy, Paul stresses the importance of compliance with his injunction, and so he says: “Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (vv. 15,16).

This good advice was given to Timothy by one who had learnt the principles of faithful discipleship so earnestly that he was in a position to offer wise counsel to the Christian converts of the first-century ecclesia and also to believers in succeeding generations. Paul encourages the zealous Timothy with the words, “If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained” (v. 6). Then the apostle impels Timothy to firmness in the implementation of his authority, so that the believers may be guided and strengthened in their commitment to his young helper: “These things command and teach” (v. 11).

In our calling as followers of Jesus we have been given much upon which to meditate in our walk to the Kingdom. Paul reminded the believers in Corinth that “ye are not your own” (1 Cor. 6:19), emphasising that their allegiance, and ours, must be to Christ, who has made all things possible for those who have put on his saving name: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The guidance offered by Paul leaves no margin whatsoever for indifference or apathy in regard to the Christian faith. He makes the point that it was the teaching of Christ that had to be the focus in the lives of the believers, as he made clear to the Colossians: “Let the word of Christ

dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another” (3:16).

Paul shows the same apostolic diligence and pastoral care in his epistle to Titus, in which he says: “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (2:12,13). The apostle reminds Titus of all that Jesus had done so that true believers might have the precious hope of salvation: “. . . who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (v. 14). He then directs Titus to let the word of exhortation and correction be applied in a way that will have the desired effect: “These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority” (v. 15).

Our ecclesial format, in which the spoken word instructs and exhorts the members in their discipleship, is in keeping with Paul’s words, “how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14). The necessary words of timely rebuke from the platform have as their aim the welfare and upbuilding of our community, lest our spiritual standards suffer in a world of wrongful practices and indifference to what God requires. In this regard it is interesting to note the rendering of 1 Timothy 4:13, quoted earlier, in the *Amplified Bible*: “Till I come, devote yourselves to [public and private] reading, to exhortation [preaching and personal appeals], and to teaching and instilling doctrine [*didaskalia*]”. *Strong’s Concordance* translates the Greek *didaskalia* as ‘doctrine, instruction, learning, and teaching’.

The threefold essentials of reading, exhortation and doctrine commended to Timothy in the exercise of his ecclesial stewardship are just as vital today as they were to the true believers in the first century, and we too are urged by Paul to “Meditate upon these things” and to “give [ourselves] wholly to them”, to “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine” and to take cognisance of what he says to Timothy with a sense of deep conviction and finality: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).