The Sermons of John Caluine upon the
Epistle of Saint Paule to Titus.

The Epistle of Saint Paule to Titus. Chapter. 1.

1 To the first time that wicked men under a colour of being of the company of the Christians, run about as much as they can, to trouble the order of the Church, and to hinder good and holy offices and commandments, they have not forwardly and marre all, as much as they have lieth. We know the state of a Church can not be maintained without good and faithful Shepherds; God hath given a good and certaine rule, to choose and appoint them by. But yet a number have gone about to put forward them selues upon ambition, & wicked practices, and that in the time of the Apostles, when the Gospel flourished in pure doctrine, it was then that vice reigned as we see. On the other side, if we were made to walk in the obedience of God, necessity must the doctrine, which is preached, be of some credit with vs, & we must resolutely hear them, to whom this charge is committed. For if we despise the Ministers, consequently it followeth that we will despise the word, & treat it as our feet. And we see howe even in Saint Paul's time, there was much rebellion and murmuring, men could well away with deceivers, and they were always welcome, though they were very chargeable.
life and to run through this world with nothing to hold us back. And because we are much too weak and our minds cannot rise so high, let us all set our sights on Jesus Christ. And as we remember that the Son of God came down to earth and then received us into glory—God having made the very angels our friends—let us regard ourselves simply as pilgrims in this world, for we do not cease to be citizens of heaven, to which we are led by hope.

That is why Paul says in another place that we are already seated in the heavenly realms (Eph. 2:6). How? Through hope! We see, then, that hope is not a lifeless thing or some poor fantasy we happen to conceive. It is such an impulse of the Holy Spirit that, although we are encompassed by this perishable body and feel a burden great enough to drag us down to hell, although our sight is pitifully dim and dark and although all our strength fails us, God nevertheless works by the power of his Holy Spirit. Thus we are lifted high and enabled to carry on, always longing for the inheritance prepared for us, and not doubting that we will reach it, because our Lord Jesus Christ will then appear, and the life which is now hidden from us will be revealed.

Now let us cast ourselves down before the face of our good God, acknowledging our faults and asking him to make us feel them more keenly. May he daily correct the ills and wrongs within us, so that we may strive solely to obey his holy commandments and to profit from them more and more, until he has rid us of all our sins and imperfections and has clothed us with his righteousness.
him not to concern himself with foolish questions and pointless disputes which can benefit no one. And because those who seek to trouble the church wish to have the last word and to come out on top, and because they might persuade God's servants to side with them, Paul insists that they be left alone. 'God's servants,' he says, 'should not bother with rogues like these.' For what is there to gain when men behave so shamelessly and bring condemnation on their own heads? They cannot be won over; it is a waste of time, for the devil possesses them and they deserve to be given over to a reprobate mind, since they fight against God and defy him out of deliberate malice.

That said, the apostle exhorts the Cretans to do good, for we know that there was much indolence among them. Despite the best efforts of such great teachers there was no obvious effect in their lives; it was as if they had never heard one word of the gospel. Accordingly Paul tells them to exert themselves so that men might see that they have profited in God's school. That is Paul's meaning in this passage.

Let us now deal with each thought in order. Paul begins: *This is a sure saying, and I want you to assert these things.* By 'a sure saying', the apostle is really warning ministers of the gospel, in the person of Titus, not to put forward outlandish ideas in the church which are entirely unsupported. They are to teach what has been tried and tested, so that God's children are built up and have an infallible faith rather than some fickle belief. Consider what Paul is saying. He is not speaking about speculations which have no basis in holy Scripture, but about things to do with our salvation—in fact, about what God has willed to reveal to us. Let us be clear that it was not because God was jealous of us that he concealed things which Scripture does not make known. He chose what is good and useful to us. So we see how stupid many people are who feel annoyed when they find no warrant in Scripture for the ideas which appeal to them. 'Why,' they ask, 'has God not spoken about this? Why is nothing said about that? Why has this question or that been left unresolved?' Ah yes, but God has revealed the things which he knew were needful for us. Let us be content, therefore, to listen to what he says, and we will find that we lack nothing. How would it be if God were to flatter our foolish whims and fill our itching ears with wind? What respect would we have for God's word if all it did was pander to our senseless appetites? But since we find in it the truth of our salvation and since we know it to be most holy and sacred, let us learn to handle and receive it with all due fear and humility.

Thus when Paul describes this saying as sure and certain, he means to keep us within bounds, and to stop us wandering off as is our habit, and prying into things that God has not revealed. We should hold to what we know is certain. For the rest, Paul warns us not to be so bold that we endorse things of which we are ignorant. What then should we do? We must not look to our own understanding and thus decide as we think fit. We must begin with what God has taught us with his own lips, otherwise our recklessness will in the end bring ridicule upon us. True, men may admire us for a time, as happens with braggarts who spread their feathers wide like peacocks! Yet when all is said and done God laughs at their arrogance. The same will be true of us if we attempt to know more than is permissible, or if we assert things we know nothing about. We need firm evidence if we are to judge what is useful to us.

Are we quite certain, then, about holy Scripture? Let us no longer ask the question 'why' or 'how': it is enough for us that God has spoken. We see how it is today. Some presumptuous people try to be clever; they are quick to rebuke God if there is anything unclear and difficult for them. 'Look here,' they cry, 'none of this makes any sense to me!' Supposing they were the greatest teachers in the world, they go beyond all bounds when they reject the word
that God has spoken. Some brutes indeed make dissent a badge
of learning and masquerade as scholars. ‘Oh,’ they say, ‘it’s hard
to stomach the idea that God saves some and rejects others as he
pleases; that he directs the world’s affairs according to his will, that
his will is sovereign and that we cannot know why he acts this way.’
Well then, if you find these things obscure, learn to humble your­
self and to be patient until you are able to profit with God’s help.

We, for our part, must learn that as long as we are in this world,
we see darkly, as Paul says (1 Cor. 13:12), and we savour only a little
of the truth. We do not have it in all its fullness until we have
been transformed into God’s glory, when we will see him face to
face. In the meantime let us walk according to our limited ability.
Still, as I have said, these rascals are not satisfied with that, and
fancy themselves as powerful scholars who argue their case with
God. Paul, on the contrary, reins us in, teaching us that when we
have clear evidence of God’s truth we must follow and obey it. He
also demands that ministers assert the truth and not speak half­
heartedly of it; they are to stand their ground however much men
may grumble and protest. If the whole world should rise against
them and try to stop the gospel going forth, they should defy all
those devils who rebel against God, however high and mighty they
may be. Let those whose task it is to teach, speak what is sure and
firmed agreed among us. God defies the world and all its demons
and utters words that are true. So come what may, nothing must
hinder us from declaring his unerring truth with utmost clarity.
Although men may bend this way and that, God’s ministers should
never bow to their wishes or swerve from the truth. That is Paul’s
message to us here.

In short, this text teaches all who proclaim God’s truth not to
preach anything which they cannot affirm is a word spoken by
God. By the same token they must observe restraint, so that they
do not waste their time on trivialities. Why so? Because God has
not revealed such things to them; he knows what is necessary for
our salvation. And for all believers there is the warning that they
should not seek to know things that our Lord has hidden from
us, for we will be trapped if we delve too far into the realms of
our imagination. Let us search instead for what is sure and solid.
Let us not plunge into the water where we cannot swim. We can
scarcely walk on dry land. What will happen to us if we leap into
the sea? Have we sufficient skill to breast the waves? Let us go
where God will keep us safe. In other words, when God through
his word has shown us the way, let us stick to it and go no further
than he allows. Let us always, enlightened by his truth, follow
where he leads, and let us halt when he declines to show us what
he knows will do us no good.

In instructing Titus to assert these things, Paul insists on the
need for authority. Titus must therefore not waver when men resist
his urging and claim that they are being bullied. ‘Although people
may be annoyed,’ he says, ‘persist with your work.’ The things that
edify must be our concern. We should above all be mindful of what
our Lord commands, and of the truths on which we are resolved
and which we must defend with invincible determination. And
when men would stop us teaching as the Lord commands, let us
stand firm and proclaim the things which are good and useful to
all. In this way the apostle shows just how ungrateful are those
who cannot bear to be edified for their own good, since they refuse
the blessing which God holds out to them. For if our Lord spoke
only of things that are obscure and beyond our reach, we might
have cause to complain that we were wasting time on speculations
which required much hard work, which in the end did us no good
and left us no wiser than before. In that case it would be right for
us to feel annoyed. When, however, our Lord condescends to our
ignorance and teaches us in so intimate a way, as a father instructs
his children or as a nursing mother stammers to her immature
infant so that he will understand—when, I say, God treats us so graciously and makes sure that there is nothing superfluous in his word—nothing which does not yield good fruit for our salvation—when we see that, must we not be mad and naturally wilful if we fail to profit by it?

On the one hand, then, Paul tells the pastors of the church not to seek prosperity or fame as they go about their work, and to aim not at what is popular or well received but at what will benefit everyone. On the other hand, when believers come to church they must not expect to have their own fancies fed; if men set out to please them, all they will get is wind! We should think to ourselves: ‘This is for my own good, so I should accept it.’ We need to be very careful, therefore, for more often than not we are like invalids who want only to drink when they should eat, and to be up and about when they should be lying still in bed. We would dearly like to escape being rebuked for our sins, and we have no wish, as the saying goes, to be scratched where we do not itch.

If we are urged to do good we want to be left alone; if we are reprimanded we fly into a rage; if our transgressions are brought to light, we gnash our teeth and will have nothing said about them. Each of us should thus be suspicious of himself and consider what is required of him—not, however, according to his own estimate, for we are constantly at risk of error. God must be our judge: only he is competent to speak. Hence Paul makes the point that these things are profitable to men.

Let us now come to the next matter which the apostle raises. Titus is instructed to avoid foolish questions. The word is meant to include anything that stirs up conflict among us. It is true that we must certainly enquire before we accept a teaching as certain. As the well-known proverb has it, ‘Only a fool doubts nothing.’ So not only is it permissible for us to ask questions in order to remedy our ignorance, it is also necessary. Why then does Paul use the word as if it were something bad? ‘Foolish questions’ is what he calls them, meaning, as we said before, whatever stirs up strife in our midst. If I ask about something which can be shown to me from God’s word, and if I accept what I am told with a meek and teachable spirit, that is not, strictly speaking, the kind of question that is meant. But if I ask and sharply object to the answer I am given, so that the argument goes on forever, that is what Paul condemns here.

So, as we well know, there are people who aim to show off by delving into problems that can never be resolved. They select an issue which allows them to say: ‘Look, here’s something worth thinking about. It’s possible to argue one way or another, but whatever solution is reached I’ll always have a ready-made objection.’ Those who act like this are evil by nature. I therefore make this point: when it comes to God’s wisdom, he wants us to be sure and certain. The essential things of course are faith and obedience. Our Lord also wants us to have tranquillity of mind, but we remain anxious and distressed until he shows us the way of salvation. Now since God wills to relieve us so that our minds are no longer troubled, when we deliberately pile question upon question, do we not reject the precious gift that God is offering us? Do we not also profane his holy word when we make it a cause of strife and controversy? Thus Paul effectively condemns such actions by calling them utter folly.

Not that this is always obvious, for as has been said, those who ask apparently serious and novel questions consider this a clever way of acquiring a name for themselves. People are deceived by them, so much so that anyone who is best skilled in prattling is the one most highly admired. Why, then, does Paul describe all such questions as foolish? His idea of folly is not the sort that men imagine. By folly he means whatever is pointless, trifling and irrelevant. So let these clever teachers stir up as many disputes as they like and be lauded for their subtle speculations. The Holy
Spirit nevertheless calls them fools, for they do not try to edify God's people or have any concern for the salvation of souls.

Paul in fact provides an example of the kind of questions he has in mind. He describes as fools those who *busy themselves with genealogies*. Now there are many people who love to prove how clever they are by tracing the number of children born to a family, and the various branches into which they later separate. It will certainly be necessary sometimes to deal with genealogies, but in doing this we must exercise restraint. There was every reason for Matthew and Luke to relate how our Lord Jesus Christ descended from Abraham. Luke indeed takes us back to Adam. Why? So that we should know that he is truly man, and also that he is the holy seed promised to Abraham, and which was more fully revealed to David once the kingdom was firmly settled in his hand and he had been told that it would be eternal. This is the sort of genealogy which ought to be explained. We note, however, how reserved the Evangelists were about it. Luke speaks of it as if in haste, so that it does not occupy too much of our attention. Again, Matthew moves smartly through his narrative, as if to say that it is enough to know that our Lord Jesus, who is called the Christ, descended from the line of Abraham and of David. Matthew is content to know him as the Redeemer who was promised of old to the holy patriarchs. The Holy Spirit, then, keeps a tight rein on us, lest we wander off to points of no importance. This is Paul's way of stressing the necessity of holding to what God has plainly taught. Why? Because he knows what is needful for us.

To genealogies Paul also adds *quarrels and controversies*, for whenever men are intent on making their mark, fire is bound to erupt. Self-interest always leads to endless strife when men fall to arguing among themselves, as Paul reminds us in Philippians (Phil. 2:3). That is why we should never be addicted to our personal wants and our sense of self-importance. We must not try to get the better of our fellows but should seek instead to build each other up. Those who are responsible for teaching should labour faithfully to that end, so as to help others to progress. All of us should employ the gifts that God has given us, sharing as members of the one body what we have received. If that is the standard by which we live there will surely be no quarreling among us. For it is not enough to obey the truth by having God as our teacher, in order that great and small may profit under him: minds which are fickle and flighty are sure to kindle a blaze. The devil has no better lackeys than those who try to get ahead of everybody else. They are plagues of the very worst kind. If a man is conceited he may have every virtue, but when it comes to leading God's church it would be better if he were a womanizer or a drunkard, for the sins of a womanizer are peculiar to himself, and the same is true of a drunkard. But when a man is so evilly disposed as to crave attention and to push himself forward, the devil has won, and unless God in his great goodness puts things right, all will be lost.

Consequently, having spoken of the need to avoid irrelevant questions, Paul adds that we should shun controversy in all its forms, for these two things always go together, as has been said. He then urges Titus to *shun a man who is a heretic, when he has been warned once or twice*. This follows from what was said before. If we did not have this word of warning, we could not put into practice what we taught earlier, for while I may want to edify the church and may earnestly strive to do so, I cannot prevent the overly curious from going astray or the factious from stirring up strife and openly resisting. What then am I to do? Paul tells me to act decisively against those who are motivated by self-interest and who try to assert themselves. Of course, even if we believed them the arguments would still go on; and supposing their mouths were stopped they would still be quick to answer back, like men who have lost all sense of shame. Experience shows us that. Nevertheless is not
the best solution to leave them alone, to reject them and to refrain from further talk?

There is thus a clear connection between this teaching and what was earlier explained. It is necessary, however, to make an important distinction here. When God's servants are drawn, willingly or no, into controversies, they are tempted to address various questions. It is true that, if given the choice, they would much rather proclaim God's will and set forth simply what is good and profitable for the salvation of all. But when they are not allowed to do this, when they are provoked and threatened with shame if they fail to reply, since these things are forced upon them they have a genuine excuse. Nevertheless, says Paul, they must not allow themselves to be thrown off course. For good reason, then, Titus is instructed to shun the man who is a heretic, for the devil is ever ready to incite men to divert us from our work, and to annoy us so that we do not have time to teach the people and to build them up as they require.

Look! Here is holy Scripture: we want to preach it purely and for the good of everyone. Yet the devil tries to close the door to us and to stir up busybodies who would distract us from all that is good and necessary. Now if that was how we spent our time, what would become of us? New objections every day, new arguments in reply—God's truth would be veiled in darkness! Let us resolve, therefore, to obey what we are commanded to do here, and leave heretics alone once we have given them one or two warnings.

Paul assumes that we have first to recognize the heretic before we cast him off. For what would happen if at every turn we condemned what we disliked? We need to be discerning in such things. When Paul speaks of heretics he singles out those who will not assent to God's truth, who depart from the unity of faith and who make trouble in the church. We read what is said in Philippians, that if believers do not agree about some point and cannot reach a unanimous decision, they must be reasonable, promoting peace and concord until God teaches them what they do not know (Phil. 3:15). We cannot know everything, and some will move ahead of others. Will he who is furthest ahead therefore despise the rest, just because he knows more? Where would that get us? It may even happen that someone who is highly versed in holy Scripture and to whom God has revealed many of his mysteries will be ignorant about a particular point. So in such cases we need to bear with one another. Anyone who is not in agreement with us should not be condemned as a heretic, for heretics are those who have come together in opposition to God's word and who turn away from the essential truths of our faith—from what is called the substance of our Christianity—and who by their actions separate others from the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those, then, who scatter the church and disturb God's house are termed heretics in this text.

When Paul writes that they must be warned, he is not speaking merely of warnings which may be privately given. He means that they should be sharply rebuked and condemned. So if today a man goes astray, he is not a heretic even though he has erred. I would say that however serious the fault is, if it is due simply to oversight he should be reprimanded; and if the offence is grave he should not be complacent about it. In any event there is no heresy when there is no open resistance and when a man does not cut himself off from the unity of believers. For heresy to exist there must be a parting of the ways. So we see that a man who has been warned privately is not a heretic on that account. If, however, he stubbornly resists and cannot be made to see reason, this must be rightly brought to public notice. That is the sort of warning which the apostle has in mind.

Thus, when efforts have been made to win a man over and when he becomes all the more bitter, openly defying God, seeking only to trouble the church and acting out of mere spite, we should judge him to be a heretic past hope. That is why he is here described as a
man ruined. The image is of a building which has utterly decayed. If there is some flaw in a house, well then, it is naturally repaired. If there are holes in the roof or cracks in a wall we set to and mend them, so that all is put right. But when the house is a complete ruin, why bother trying? It will be a waste of time, and the damage we do will be worse than before! Paul says that a person who has no fear of God is ruined. A man may err in some respect, but provided he still has some root of God’s fear in him he will finally be won back. From experience we know this to be true of those who have wrong ideas. Anyone who harbours a false belief but who has some fear of God is sure, sooner or later, to be reclaimed, for the foundation remains and the house can again be built on it. But when someone is so incensed against God that his devilish self-will carries him away, what is there to gain? We must therefore carefully judge and recognize whether a man is ruined or not. How do we do that? He is first gently instructed, then brought before the church, as if in God’s presence, and is warned and chastised. If, however, he is hardened and has, as Scripture says, a spirit of bitterness (Heb. 12:15), so that he accepts nothing that is told him, then he is a ruined man. It is clear that there is nothing left on which to build. Why so? Because there is no fear of God in him which can serve as a foundation. That is Paul’s meaning in this verse.

Now if those whose duty it is to preach God’s word are warned to shun heretics, this must also apply to the whole body of the church. For if an individual opposes a heretic, what can he do? He must certainly try as best he can to bring him to God. If there is one sheep which strays it must be brought back to the flock. Yes, but if there is a wolf, should it be brought into the flock in order to scatter it? Do they not mock God who say, as many do, ‘He’s a poor lost sheep. He ought to be brought back.’ In reality, as we know, he is a wolf, or rather a devil, whose one aim is to destroy everything. Yet are we to pretend that nothing is amiss? Do we claim to be wiser than God? If we cannot understand this, our Lord will be avenged on us for our carelessness and a similar condemnation will fall on us. Nothing else will be achieved by those who want to go beyond the bounds. Now if it is wrong to go too far in winning heretics when they prove to be past hope, what would happen if we welcomed them into our homes, fed them and were more friendly to them than to any kinsman or brother? Or if those who dispensed justice and who should therefore use their powers to punish heretics and drive them away, clamoured to protect them? They would be sure to turn up among us and brazenly defy God at every opportunity. Look! Here is a man of authority in government: he truly claims to uphold the gospel and he receives the Supper of our Lord. Yet you are nothing but a Judas! You see before you heretics who have undermined God’s teaching, you welcome them, you do them favours! What good does it do, except to pollute and play havoc with everything?

That is how this text of Paul must be applied. A heretic, having been warned as was earlier said, should be advised with solemn protestations, and as in God’s presence, that he must be shunned like a deadly plague if he stubbornly persists. Let no one say: ‘Come now, does not the church take pity on people who believe and repent?’ Indeed it does! But when we see some whose mouth and heart God has closed openly blaspheming and showing no signs of repentance, should we bring them back into the flock? We know the duties required of true ministers of the gospel. They need a gentle and loving voice to draw into the flock those who are teachable and disposed to learn; but they must also drive off wolves and thieves and have a voice which cries out against all who would

1 The Reformer alludes yet again to his Libertine opponents who, throughout Servetus’ trial and detention (August–October 1553), appeared for reasons of their own to be sympathetic to the prisoner. In Calvin’s eyes their sympathy was tantamount to collusion.
scatter the flock. Those are the tasks which must occupy God's servants if they would properly perform their work.

Paul now brings his letter to a close. Let our people, he writes, learn to excel in good works. He makes the same point as before, that they should endeavour to do good. Here he draws a contrast with the absurd arrogance of the many who prided themselves on their clever speculations. 'Oh,' he says, 'your theories are fine, but consider in what way God's children are really meant to excel. It is when they show that they have profited by doing good and when they strive to achieve that end.' The words 'let them learn' suggest that up until then they had misspent their time, driven by foolish self-will and preoccupied by idle thoughts. 'But now,' says Paul, 'you must change course. From now on you must excel in good works and not in useless chatter. Your anxiety and concern to get ahead must be set aside, and each of you should try hard to serve his neighbour.'

Paul takes 'good works' to mean both almsgiving and all the other helps that we can give to those who need our aid. Let us therefore learn to be usefully employed, and although in the past we may have been lazy and indifferent, and may even have been like those whom Paul addresses here, from now on we are assured that the Lord has us in his school, and has shown us such grace that, transported by love for him, we seek only the best and closest ties with our neighbours. So we must each consider what lies within his power, and according to the ability given us by God, let us all serve one another. This is how we show that we have not received the gospel in vain.

Now let us cast ourselves down before the face of our good God, acknowledging our faults and begging him to make us feel them more keenly than before. May he not allow us to misuse and profane his holy teaching by wrongly interpreting its meaning,