

## **THE OFFENCE OF THE TRUTH**

Consider what is involved in the breaking of bread. The broken bread tells of a crucified Christ; but why should he be crucified? Why should the kindness of God require such a tragedy? Why could He not bring His love to bear without pain—without death—in the process? There must be something serious at the root of the matter. There must be some principle of very grave moment underlying the appearance of the Son of God as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

*"It pleased Yahweh to bruise him,"* but not without a reason. It is that reason we would dwell upon this morning. It is a reason that strikes no chord of sympathetic response in the natural mind, but which lies deep in the eternal constitution of things, and commands the homage of the highest intellect. It is that God's supremacy is the first law of the universe, and absolute submission to Him the first condition of well being to the creatures He has made. It is impossible for us to have this too clearly or too constantly in view. It is the great lesson of the Law of Moses which was given as a schoolmaster to teach lessons of the Truth. It is the great truth that is less and less recognised by the religious world. Where there is any living recognition of god at all, it is His love, His kindness that is spoken of. This is right in its place, God is love; but He is more. Paul tells us that He is a consuming fire; Daniel, that He is great and dreadful, and terrible; Moses, that He is a jealous God, and will be magnified and sanctified in all that approach to Him. He tells us Himself that He is tenacious of His prerogatives, and will not give His glory to another. This is all according to reason. Is He not great who fills, controls, and has made the universe? Is He not to be honoured who has constituted all things in such perfect wisdom? Is He not to be feared who holds all things in the hollow of His hand, and who could hurl them to destruction in a moment? Is He not naturally and reasonably the Head who knows the workings of all things? Is it not fit and beautiful that His will should be insisted on as the only permissible rule of action where created beings are endowed with the power of rational choice? To all these questions there can only be one answer, and that answer furnishes the key to the enigma of Calvary. Man has sinned: his admission to fellowship and life everlasting with God is impossible, except on the basis of the complete reassertion of God's supremacy: the perfect vindication of His righteousness; the absolute humiliation and subordination of a man before Him. These conditions are secured in the representative death of him in whom, though standing in the condemned nature of the represented sinning race, God could be well pleased. The will of God perfectly done in a life long enough for the purpose, though brief, was the qualifying preliminary for the suffering of that condemnation of sin in the flesh which was accomplished in the nailing of Adam's mortal nature to the tree. It established the efficient cause of that resurrection to life of which Jesus, although suffering, became the subject on the morning of the third day. We need to keep a strong eye on his life, his death, his resurrection to feel what we ought always to feel concerning the greatness and holiness of God, and the powerless, titleless, and unacceptable condition of man before Him.

Paul tells us that Christ having thus risen from the dead lives to die no more:

*"Death hath no more dominion over him."*

But death continues to have dominion over mankind. We have then to realise to ourselves for a moment the relation of Christ to mankind. Are all to receive from him the salvation which he has received from God? A very superficial reading of the testimony is sufficient to settle this point. Two statements of Paul are decisive if there were not hundreds of other statements backed up by the most powerful reason. These are:

*"He is able to save them to the uttermost 'that come unto God' by him."*

*"He is the author of eternal salvation for 'all them that obey him'."*

The salvation that is in Christ is to be conferred on a principle that restricts it to a very few. The principle is that of faith and obedience. The shape this principle takes is visible before us in the gospel, otherwise styled 'the Truth.' In this we have things submitted to us for our belief. "He that believeth" is the constant description of the man whom God will save. Let us look also at this. As on other points, so on this. Men are prone to be loose, indifferent, careless. They easily think either that 'it does not matter what we believe,' or that if we are right on one or two points, it is sufficient. Both these positions are positions that will not be taken by such as have attained to a right understanding of the ways of God. Nothing is more certain in the teaching of the Scriptures than that belief of the Truth is the very first condition of acceptance with God. We are all agreed on this, and therefore I need not argue it. It is sufficient at present to say that it is in the highest degree reasonable, and in accordance with our experience of the relations of rational being. How could even men be in friendship and harmony that did not know and believe in one another? How could men be acceptable with God who were ignorant or unbelieving with reference to Himself and His plans and requirements?

But many agree to this who say it is enough that we know a little. Enlightenment will dispel this impression. The Truth is made up of a number of things necessary to its completeness, as light is made up of a number of different coloured rays. Consider how inevitable it is that all have their place. A first element of the Truth is the knowledge of God's existence and character; but would anyone maintain that it is enough that we "*believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him?*" Would they say it is unnecessary for us to "*know Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent?*" Surely not. The knowledge of the Father would be sufficient without the knowledge of the Son; for the Son is the way to the Father. And now consider the knowledge of the Son. This is made up of a number of items or details, all of which are necessary in their place. This will quickly appear if we suppose anyone contending that it was sufficient to know that there was, or had been such a being. Would it not be necessary to know that he died as well as that he lived? Would a belief in the life and birth of Jesus be sufficient without a knowledge of his crucifixion and the divine object of that tragedy? Very little thought is needed to answer this question decisively in the negative. Very well. We advance. Would a knowledge of his birth and death be sufficient without a knowledge of his resurrection? On this Paul expressly says that if Christ be not raised, our faith is vain (I Cor. 15:14) and that we must believe with the heart that God raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). And thus we may go on through the whole list of the things that constitute 'the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.' The ascension of Christ, the priesthood of Christ, the judgeship of Christ, the kingship of Christ, and, therefore, the kingdom of Christ, on the basis of the covenant made with David and with Abraham—all these things are vital constituents of "*the whole counsel of God,*" and will be insisted on by faithful men in the basis of fellowship to be accepted and upheld among believers: and there will be a similar insistence on the part of such, on the rejection of all opinions and dogmas that have a tendency to make void any of them.

Why should there be such objection on the part of many to this enlightened and consistent attitude? It is to be suspected that the root lies in the aversion to another truth which lies most plainly on the face of all Bible teachings, but which is most uncongenial to the natural and unenlightened mind, and that is that man is naturally in a state of alienation from God, and incapable by any course of conduct he may pursue of working out a hope for himself. So long as men have a secret sentiment that salvation is an affair of natural quality, such as being kindly, honest, harmless, etc., they naturally rebel against what necessarily seems to them strait-laced views of salvation and duty. They take pleasure in the thought that it does not matter what you believe, and that all that a man need care for is such a degree of moral excellence as will pass creditable muster with his neighbour. As for the questions of

‘doctrine’ they scout them as interminable and immaterial, and they are best held in utter abeyance. Well, such a view of matters would be more convenient and pleasing to all men naturally. If it is a true view, no one could wish to do otherwise than act upon it. But is it a true view? That is the question. The answer of God alone can determine this; and in the Bible alone in our age can we have it. The answer is without uncertainty or reserve. It is that condemnation hath passed upon all men (Rom. 5:18), that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), that in His sight no man living can be justified (Psa. 143:2), that in our natural position we have no hope and are without God (Eph. 2:12). Let this truth be once for all truly recognised, and the nature of our position in the world and our relation to futurity is greatly simplified. The way is then clear for the question: What must we do to be saved? And the answer to the question is as clear as the question itself. Our attention is fixed on Christ:

*“There is none other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved.”*

*“Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.”*

*“No man can come unto the Father but by me.”*

*“Except ye believe on me, ye shall die in your sins.”*

*“I am the way, the truth and the life.”*

*“He that eateth me, even he shall live by me.”*

*“He that believeth on me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”*

If these things be true, why should we not insist on them? It is the great offence of the Truth to do so. We are called uncharitable and narrow-minded because we re-echo the declarations of a Teacher whom we believe and whom mankind around us profess to regard as a teacher come from God. It is not a question of charity at all. It is a question of truth. It is charitable to declare the truth surely. It is highly uncharitable to withhold it. This question of charity is much misapplied. It is beautiful—indispensable—that we be charitable; but charity must run on legitimate lines. Let us be charitable to the utmost with our own things: we have no right to be charitable with the things of God, His ways, or His words. *“He that hath My Word,”* saith God, *“let him speak it faithfully.”* What would be thought of a revenue officer dispensing alms out of the government funds, or relaxing the claim of dues out of kindly feeling? He must apply to his own purse to meet the claims of charity. People have no right to be charitable with the Truth of God—that is to hide it, or cloak it, or modify it for the sake of the feelings of men. Yet this is where the cry of charity is always raised; and, as a rule, it is raised by those who are not distinguished by charity in the regulation of their own affairs. If a man encroach on their rights, if a man do them an injury, if a man speak evil of them; oh, then, there is flaming zeal “in duty to myself;” but duty to God—well, that is something they are prepared to be very charitable with. Let us get away from this fog and see that it is not uncharity but the plainest duty and the highest charity to say that men have no hope by nature, and that they can only acquire hope by submission to the institutions promulgated 1,800 years ago—which consist, in brief, in faith in the apostles’ testimony concerning Christ, and obedience to the commandments they delivered in his name. When this ground is clearly taken, there will be more readiness to insist upon the whole truth as the basis of fellowship with the professed believers in the gospel of Christ, and less disinclination to take the logical issue and all its responsibilities, as the hopeless position of all who are seeking the favour of God in any other way than the way of His own appointment.

But in all things there is a possibility of going to extremes—ugly and hurtful extremes, and this matter is no exception—great and glorious though it is. We have to *“contend earnestly for the Faith once delivered to the saints;”* but we may possibly do this to the destruction of the very things we are contending for. The same Word that commands us to be valiant for the Truth commands us to *“speak the truth in love.”*

*“The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men.”*

*“The fruit of peace is sown in peace of them that make peace.”*

I have known some element of the beautiful truth contended for with bitterness and a rancour and a hatred as great and ugly as was ever shown by the most uncircumcised politician of the flesh. Solomon speaks of a “jewel of gold in a swine’s snout.” Such a comparison seems the only fitting one for such a conjunction. Men have nothing to do with the doctrinal distinctions and definitions of divine wisdom who have not learnt the first and the great commandment and its fellow, on which hang all the law and the prophets. It is written that to love God with all the heart and our neighbour as ourselves is more than all burnt offerings and sacrifice. So we may say that such an attainment is more than all points of doctrine that are not held and contended for in the meek and benevolent spirit which is meet in a created being in dealing with the holy and terrible verities of the Eternal. We must never forget the words of Paul, which most of us are well acquainted with, but which is it certain, weigh little with very many.

*“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels.... though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have all faith so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind. Charity envieth not, charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.”*

These words will measure us at the last. The law of love and long-suffering is the law of God. The universe is constructed and worked on this principle in nature and revelation. If we omit it from our spiritual operations, we are out of harmony with the scheme of things, however contentious we may be for points of truth. It is an apostle that hath said:

*“He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love.”*

*“He shall have judgment without mercy that sheweth no mercy.”*

*“He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in darkness even till now.”*

Contentiousness is not faithfulness, though faithfulness has more or less the element of contentiousness, in the sense of contending for the right. Faithfulness is espousing and doing and adhering to the right at all hazard; but in the genuine case, it is always in love and patience. When it is allied with “*bitterness and anger, and wrath, and malice and evil-speaking,*” it is not acceptable to God or any of His children. When men easily and naturally slide into accusation and condemnation of others, especially in their absence, they prove themselves the children of the flesh, whatever their knowledge may be. The angels are models to whom Peter points. He contrasts them with a certain class in his day, whom he describes as “*presumptuous and self-willed,*” and Jude as “*murmurers and complainers,*” “*who are not afraid to speak evil of dignities, whereas angels, ‘who are greater in power and might,’ bring not railing accusations against them (sinners) before the Lord.*”

If angels with such power and penetration and correct reading, indulge in no railing accusations against undoubtedly wicked men, where should the sons of God in this mortal and erring state, be found in the matter? In the very attitude commanded by Christ: “*Judge not—condemn not*”—contend for the faith, but indulge in no personal railing. Be faithful to the claims, obligations, and injunctions of the Truth, but leave all personal recriminations to the children of the flesh, whose destination is to be taken away in wrath. Wherever men are prone to rancour and severity of personal judgment, you may be sure the Spirit of Christ is not there; and you know what is written:

*“If any man hath not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”*

And how easy would conformity to such lessons of wisdom be if we could have the full view of the latter end. It is there waiting for us, however insensible we may be to it. It is either to

lie down and leave all, and be laid away from the land of the living; or it is to be brought suddenly, one of these days, into the solemn presence of god's works, actually begun again upon the earth in the reappearance of Christ on the earth. In either case we part for ever with the circumstances and surroundings of present life, and in both we come at once into relation with living judgment of the Word from which we may hide ourselves in comfort at the present time: for we know that in death there is not a moment to the dead, and that a man dying appears to himself to be ushered at once into the presence of Christ at his coming. Consider and realise now how small will seem the things that vex or interest us now; and how much shall we feel in need of that mercy on which all at last must throw themselves, and how odious to ourselves will at that time appear the rancour and strifes, and hard thoughts and speeches in which we may too easily permit ourselves to indulge in now. Those who are blind to this ultimate bearing of the Truth—who seem incapable of detaching from the relations of the present mortal state—call this sentimentality.

It is a misnomer altogether. It is the presentation of truth that is bound to come at last to every man with a terrible force when he finds himself in the presence of the tribunal, where things will be measured according to the divine rule of estimation.

Be it ours in advance to be the children of wisdom in the recognition of the ways of wisdom, that wisdom at last may gladden us with that stupendously glorious award which she holds in both hands for the accepted of the Lord:

*“Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour.”*

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