

Go Forth to Him Without the Camp

"Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but seek one to come" (Heb. 13:13-14).

The epistle to the Hebrews is a call to Jewish believers to leave the Law completely. The time had come for a final break. The Law given by Moses had served its purpose. The intervening period of transition between the death of Christ and the destruction of the Temple was nearly over.

God did not just give Israel a bare command to leave the Law. Rather He gave, in this epistle, a beautiful, satisfying, reasoned explanation and revelation of the infinitely better way in Christ. This is the message of Hebrews -- how Christ so beautifully fulfills every type, answers every question, supplies every need.

It was a time of tremendous transition for the Jewish believer. Moses and the Law had been ingrained into every fiber of their national being for so long. Now the Old Covenant had waxed old and was ready to vanish away. The glorious New Covenant -- the Abrahamic -- was in force, established by the blood of Christ.

Those who were blindly wedded to the ritual of the old were lost and dismayed. But those who saw the purpose and meaning and deep typical significance of the glorious Law God had given Israel through Moses, were ready and eager for the change. Chapter 13, the final chapter, consists of personal exhortation and the great call to go forth in faith unto Christ without the camp, bearing his reproach.

"Let brotherly love continue" (v. 1).

Brotherly love is the key to everything. Without it, nothing can succeed; with it, nothing can fail. It was especially important at this great crisis of doctrinal transition during which the apostles wrote. It is equally important in the problems of today. We talk so much of love, but we so easily forget it, when issues are raised and emotions are aroused. Let us ever remember James' searching words:

"Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

In our ignorant self importance, we so often think our anger can advance God's glory.

"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers" (v. 2).

Notice the word "strangers." This is a command of God just as much as baptism is a command. Do we do it? Do we entertain strangers? When did we do it last?

There are two kinds of people in the world. One group is very large, one is very, very tiny -- the small-minded and the big; the fleshly and the spiritual, the self-centered and the self-sacrificing. The Scriptures call them: goats and sheep, tares and wheat, unfaithful and faithful

stewards of God's goods. It is quite easy to tell which group we belong to: "If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged," "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers." The thought is broader than simply entertainment or hospitality. Literally it is, "of the love of strangers be not neglectful."

As the apostle says elsewhere (Gal. 6:10) --

"Do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

Not just as an incidental, self-pleasing, meaningless hobby, but a full time, wholehearted, dedicated way of life.

"Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity as being yourselves also in the body" (v. 3).

This is the second greatest command --

"Love your neighbor as yourself "

Not just love your neighbor, that's quite common and meaningless in various self-satisfying degrees, but --

"Love your neighbor AS YOURSELF."

There is a world of difference.

Thank God there are some like this today! And their life is a glorious fulfillment of what life was meant to be. But how few they are! But they alone are Christ's true brethren and sisters, the only ones he will recognize when he comes. He makes this so abundantly clear in Matthew 25 --

"When saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison?"

How blind we can be if we do not want to see!

"Marriage is honorable in all" (v. 4).

Rather, more correctly, as in the Revised Version and the Diaglott, "Let marriage be honorable among all." It is an exhortation, a command. Let everything to do with this major aspect of natural life be pure and beautiful and spiritual and in harmony with the glorious ideal that God established at its beginning.

The world has made such a sad travesty and corruption and degradation and failure of what could be life's most beautiful and comforting and helpful natural aspect. How man always cheapens and degrades everything he touches! How childishly, how pitifully, they deck out and adorn their poor corrupting bodies, but how naked are their souls! God will judge all who corrupt His pure and holy ways.

"Let your conversation be without covetousness" (v. 5).

"Conversation" here means "custom, way of life, frame of mind, character, outlook." Covetousness is simply wanting something we do not need; and our needs are very, very few. This is the mainspring of the whole world's activities, but the brethren of Christ are called to a higher, more satisfying way of life. They are called to free themselves from the shackles of selfishness and desire, to fill their minds with the infinitely more satisfying joy of service to God and to man.

"Be content with such things as ye have" (v. 5).

Contentment is a wonderful blessing. It is one of God's greatest gifts to His children. It is the essential foundation of happiness and peace. Paul said to the Philippians, writing in bonds and from prison --

"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

Surely one of the Spirit's greatest and most essential lessons! Until we learn this, we are children, wanting, wishing, desiring, seeking a mocking illusionary joy in getting and possessing -- accumulating and hoarding, ever fearful of the morrow.

When we have learned this, we are men. We are ready for God's work; we have cleared the decks, we have girded our loins. We are ready to be useful in the divine purpose. We have become spiritual adults. We have found true peace and satisfaction and happiness and security.

"For He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (v. 5).

This was said to Jacob when he left home in fear of his brother and started out alone into the unknown.

It was said to Joshua, when he lost Moses, and found himself alone with the whole burden of Israel.

It was said to the humble young Solomon as he was about to take on the rulership of the nation after David.

Have we a right to appropriate the promise to ourselves? --

"I WILL NEVER LEAVE THEE OR FORSAKE THEE."

Clearly, from Paul's words here, we have, though it was never spoken generally, but to specific individuals at specific times. There is a comforting lesson here. God is no respecter of persons.

"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope."

Do we believe this promise that He will not forsake us? Are we willing to trust ourselves to it in faith? Are we willing to do, to our fullest means and abilities and resources, what comes to hand TODAY and leave provision for the MORROW to God? We are told earlier in this epistle that --

"He that cometh to God MUST BELIEVE -- must have faith"

-- and faith, says James, calls for deeds, not words. Why are we reminded (in Heb. 11) of all these wonderful things that ordinary weak, fearful men and women like ourselves have risen to through the power of living Faith? Is it not to teach us the solemn, vital truth that we, too, must, in perfect faith, follow the same path if we would reap the same reward?

"Remember them which have the rule over you" (v. 7).

Again, it is better in the Revised Version -- "them which had the rule over you, which spoke unto you the Word of God." It is a calling to remembrance. He is clearly reminding them of former leaders, and their faithfulness to the end of their lives: "considering the END of their conversation (way of life)."

James (who was put to death by Herod) is the only one of the apostles whom we know would be in this category, but doubtless by this time, just before the destruction of Jerusalem, others had sealed their testimony with their blood. The last days of terrible vengeance were about to come on the guilty nation as Jesus had foretold. Patriotism would soon be at a fever pitch, and all who did not enter into the defense of the Mosaic institutions would be branded as traitors and cowards. This was the "time of trouble" of which Jesus had warned.

"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and for ever" (v. 8).

The emphasis is on the contrast between that which is eternal and unchanging, and that which is temporal and passing. The Law was a temporary arrangement. Christ is an eternal, living reality. Paul's reference clearly is back to the quotation from the Psalms given in chapter 1, which he applied there to Christ --

"Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail."

Tremendous changes were impending for the Jewish race -- God's ancient people -- terrible, convulsive, destructive changes. They were to be cast out and scattered, the temple burnt, the city destroyed, the land plundered and desolated.

In the process, the whole Mosaic framework would of necessity collapse and come to an end. How urgent, then, that they be anchored to that which would never, could never, change.

"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and for ever."

The one fixed point in all Creation; the Nail fastened in a sure place, the Cornerstone of the eternal Temple, the Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, made --

"Not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life."

For us, too, the message is the same. The changing background is different but the eternal alternative to which we are called is the same.

"The things that are seen are temporal"

-- for the Gentile just as for the Jew. We live as Israel did then, at a time of tremendous and revolutionary change. Change in everything in the world around us, its standards, morals, way of life, the patterns of world power and control and influence -- all are in violent flux. There are no fixed points of reference anymore. The sea and the waves are roaring.

Nations throughout the earth who have slept in backward obscurity while the white man has ruled and seized and plundered, and oppressed, are now rising in long pent-up and held-back blind fury. Warfare -- domination of his fellow man -- always man's chief occupation and delight, is daily opening up broader avenues of cruelty, horror, and mass murder on a hitherto undreamed of scale. This is twentieth century civilization.

And in what was once the Christadelphian body, vast and destructive changes are well advanced with their pernicious work, and gathering momentum.

Surely, as in the last terrible days of Israel's Commonwealth, we need to be reminded, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever." Here alone is reality, stability, continuity, eternity.

Paul, in the next few verses, leads up to the great climax of the whole epistle -- the trumpet call (v. 13) --

"Let us go forth therefore unto him, without the camp, bearing his reproach."

"For here we have no continuing city, but seek one to come."

It was a call to Israel to leave behind every aspect of Gentilism -- the way of the world -- the mind of the flesh. Soon in our readings we shall read again John's words --

"Love not the world, neither the things of the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but of the world."

In leading up to the climax of his appeal, Paul calls attention to a strange and wonderful aspect of the Law -- a hidden mystery woven right into the fabric of the Law -- in fact, placed at the very heart and apex of the whole Mosaic system.

The great day in Israel was the Day of Atonement, the tenth day of the seventh month -- still kept in mechanical, ritualistic ignorance, but as a wonderful witness, three thousand years after its establishment, by blind, wandering Israel -- Yom Kippur.

All the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Mosaic dispensation focussed toward this one solemn, yearly event when the High Priest, in a completely deserted and empty Tabernacle, went into the Most Holy Place to make atonement with the sacrificial blood.

This supreme sacrifice -- the sacrifice whose blood entered the Most Holy -- must be burned without the camp.

It was not to be consumed upon the Altar, and no man in the whole Mosaic system might partake of its flesh.

The one great central sacrifice, to which all the year's repeated sacrifices pointed, must be burned entirely outside the whole Mosaic organization. Here, in its crowning event, the Law portrayed its own inadequacy and pointed to the one great sacrifice for sin who would establish righteousness and open a way over, above, beyond, and outside of the Law of fleshly ordinances given to Israel through Moses.

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. We have here no continuing city, no ties to the present, no interest in earthly things.

Paul concludes with a beautiful prayer that God may lead them to a practical application of these things to themselves, without which all is meaningless; that He may in His love, and by His marvelous power, make them perfect in purity and holiness without which no man shall see God.

"Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the Everlasting Covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Heb. 13:20-21).

(Taken from "Be Ye Transformed" Volume 2 pages 351-357 by Bro. G. Growcott)