

Griefs

That which has induced us to come together, brethren and sisters, is our knowledge of the griefs that underlie this present state of existence. Without a knowledge of them, we should fail to appreciate the great provision symbolized on the table. Those griefs are not always visible. Our surroundings deceive us sometimes. The occupations of health have a tendency, in the merely secular sight, to hide from view the evils that are gnawing at the vitals of human existence. All of us are more or less liable to this blindness. But when, as occasionally happens, we see those with whom we are familiar and whom we love, drawn aside from the path of active life, and laid down in the corner to die, and ultimately deposited in the unseen place from which no human being ever emerges by nature, we are made to feel our real state, which, at its best, is "vanity"; and we are enabled to see more clearly than ever, that the truth which we have set our minds upon is the only truly valuable thing there is. Everything else is worthless in itself, however good it may appear at the time. It ultimately vanishes from sight. Men are wise or foolish in proportion as they act upon the recognition of this fact—that the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which (now) are not seen are eternal. At the critical junctures of life men feel their position in this matter. When, in any shape, we come under the shadow of death, we feel how wise or how foolish we have been. If when we get there, we feel comforted in spirit, having the answer of a good conscience, and view with satisfaction the prospect of lying down to the shortest of sleeps, which will terminate all the relations of this life for ever, and introduce us without a conscious interval to those higher relations of being that will open with the resurrection—then probably our course in the truth has been a wise one.

But if on the other hand, you shrink from the cloud and cling to the life of the flesh, if you feel disconcerted and out of harmony with the great change, if you would rather turn your eyes from the future and fix them with desire upon things connected with the little, time allotted to this mortal state—then there is reason to revise our course. There is only one course that is really wise, and that is, modelling life in harmony with what is to be and not with what is. Let us give this Word of God a supreme place in our lives. Living after the flesh, we shall die, but if we, through the Spirit, subdue the waywardness and corruptness of the natural man, we shall live. Such as are after the flesh, do **mind the things of the flesh**: such as are after the Spirit, **the things of the Spirit** (Rom. 8:5). Here is a great criterion by which to judge ourselves. Let us give ourselves entirely to the things presented to our view in the word of the Spirit. A half course is madness. It involves the sacrifice of the present and the loss of the future. We know him who has said, that except a man surrender all, he cannot be his disciple. We must treat ourselves and all we have as the property of Christ. Thus only can we lay up for ourselves a store against the time to come. Life in any other fashion will be of no value to us. Treasure otherwise bestowed, is lost, as many will see in that day when, too late, they will bewail their folly with weeping and gnashing of teeth. Every achievement, every attainment, every distinction we may work out in the secular sphere, or accomplishment we may acquire—and it is astonishing the amount of time and energy expended upon accomplishments which are of no solid use whatever, but dictated solely by "*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life*"—will die with the efflux of time.

Only Christ remains—the same yesterday today and for ever. The inutility of ordinary human pursuits becomes apparent even now. After forty, people begin to look at the serious side of things, though truly some persons never look at that side at any age, as some do at an earlier age. But taking the ordinary run of mankind, when the meridian of life is passed, things in general begin to appear in their true colours, and the result is generally dispiriting. Most men live for transient purposes, and the consequence is, as the interest of those purposes wears off—having nothing to fall back upon—they sink into an insipid state, which, having no purpose or hope, has no nobility and no joy. On how

many thousands of countenances is this condition depicted? The practical bearing of this is obvious. Nothing profits in the end but the truth. A life in this will be ever green and flourishing—even now. While the outward man perishes, the inward man is renewed day by day. But if secular objects only are pursued, there will be no inward man to renew, and all will be desolation when the inevitable period arrives for the decay of all pertaining to the outward man.

The truth is the only thing whereby we can be discharged from the grave, ever remembering, of course, that this deliverance will not be given to those merely knowing the truth; it will be reserved for the class of people who answer to the characteristics described by Peter in the chapter read (1 Pet. 4). You will find he recommends a certain attitude to be observed by believers, in this present life. He says, that as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, we are to arm ourselves with the same mind, for he that hath suffered in the flesh **hath ceased from sin; that he should no longer live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.** There is no ambiguity about this. The meaning is plain. Those who are heirs of life, in so far as they acquire a title by connection with Christ, are to make their heirship sure, by walking after the course indicated. Their time, after coming to the knowledge of the truth, is not to be spent in "the lusts of men," but in doing the will of God. Great stress is laid in all the Scriptures on this feature—**the doing of the will of God.** Jesus brings it out forcibly when he says to certain, "*Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? He that DOETH the will of my Father, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*" So does James: "*Be ye doers of the word and not hearers ONLY.*"

The rule of action is therefore exceedingly simple. Are we acting in conformity with Christ? Are we doing the will of God? This is a simple question that will enable everybody to test himself. The will of God is luminously indicated, and it will be our fault if we ignore the many features of it affecting practical life. Learning that will, our labour should daily be to harmonize our walk with what is written. The principal part of this labour lies in a matter we have often to speak of. If men would be doers of the will of God, they must be familiar with it; it must be written upon their hearts, so that in the exigencies of life, they will not need to refer to it, as to a lexicon or a concordance. In only one way can this condition be reached in our day. In only one way can the will of God become a living law within us. We are not to expect illumination except in the way God has given it. He has sent His servants to make His will known. He has told us plainly and elaborately what He would have us to do, and what kind of people He would have us be and all we have to do is to make ourselves acquainted with what He has said. This requires continual reading, without discouragement, with great perseverance, of the things that God has caused to be written for our instruction. By this means, the divine law will in course of time work into our nature, and become written in our hearts—a living power within, which will outwardly manifest itself in the doing of the will of God. Adopting this course, we may hope to follow out the course described in Peter's words—no longer living the rest of our time to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. This is a course which at present is beset with much that is the opposite of pleasure.

Although the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, will be amongst our experiences, our comfort will be somewhat tried by the social penalties involved. Doing the will of God means being a social hermit, for the friend of God is necessarily isolated from "society" in all its pursuits and pleasures; he is thrust into a corner; he has to occupy himself with work and with people that yield no present gratification; his endurance is much put to test; he has no continuing city. This has been the position of all the servants of God from the beginning: he has to think of this and take courage. "*Above all things,*" says Peter, "*have fervent charity among yourselves.*" This is a needful exhortation. We are in a very disjointed condition at present. Men are on all hands imperfect, and, of course, brethren too; and if we do not clothe ourselves with something of divine magnanimity that puts up with the frailties and shortcomings of men, we shall never get on at all. We have to shut our

eyes to a great deal. We need not give countenance to faults, but we must not be too critical; we must forbear much and pass things by, or we shall only make a bad job worse. Charity hides a multitude of sins. It exhibits solicitude towards one's neighbour; it looks not only to one's own things, but about the things of others and is rather prone to put a good construction (where such is possible) upon a man's actions, than a bad one. As Paul declares, "*Charity thinketh no evil, and is not easily provoked.*"

"*Use hospitality one to another without grudging,*" continues Peter; "*as every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*" This exhortation contains an idea that is also full of good sense, the realization of which would often enable people to act a more sensible part than they do. Everything a man has, he is indebted to God for, inasmuch as by whatever means he has acquired it, those means have been bestowed upon him, in one way or another, by the permission or action of the Deity. If a man procure a position through his talents, he is as much indebted to the source of his being, as if the position were conferred without the interposition of those talents leading to it; for those talents have been bestowed upon him; he did not create them himself. If, again, he has favourable connection with trade, or is related to opulent people, by whom he gets position and substance, he is again a beneficiary of God, for the circumstances leading to the substance were not his own contriving. If he accumulates a fortune by industry, there is no more ground for boasting than if God had put the money in his hand, because he has been fortunately constituted upon a principle that has enabled him to be industrious. Everything a man has he has received, and therefore he ought to be modest in his use thereof, and kindly in his attitude to the less fortunate.

This a brother of Christ will be, acting as a good steward in those things that constitute to him the favour of God. In everything in which he can do good, he must do good without grudging. Well-doing begrudged is absurd. A man brings nothing into the world, and can take nothing out. He is only a steward of what belongs to God. A cheerful exercise of his stewardship is sensible and well-pleasing to God. Nothing else will be accepted. To do it, requires determination. Such a man will often have to act against his feelings. If we wait till a duty is pleasant before we do it, we shall often fail, and arrive at the end of the journey with a barren life to look back to. Pleasure, even in the matter of duty, is an uncertain star to steer by. If we steer by it, we are sure to go wrong. What we have to do is to consider the things that are right, and to do them. Do not do them because it will please anybody else; but in your own mind cultivate the habit of seeing Him who is invisible, and acting from the force of that consideration. If you do that, you will keep always at work, from one year's end to another, under all circumstances. If the principle of your action is the love of God, you won't be driven off the line. If you are driven off by a wrong twist of affairs, you are not the right sort of man: you were acting from some side consideration. The truth in its naked force was not your bond, and you will have no ground of complaint if Jesus tells you at the last, that as you were unfaithful in that which is least, you are not fit to be entrusted with the great things of the age to come.

(Taken from "Seasons of Comfort" Volume 1, pages 232-235 by Bro. R. Roberts.)