

Reproach

Our attention has been called this morning to the remarkable exhortation of Paul to the Hebrews, in the 13th chapter of his epistle to them, verse 13: "*Let us go forth, therefore, unto him **without the camp**, bearing his reproach.*" This exhortation had a meaning for those to whom Paul was writing which it cannot have for us. They were Jews who, like himself, had been brought up in subjection to the Mosaic institutions in all particulars, and whose acceptance, of Christ brought upon them excommunication from the synagogue, and all the reproach connected with an apparent apostasy from a Divine institution, and an acceptance of what was accounted a cunningly devised and magically supported imposture. Their steadfastness was put under a powerful strain in having to accept an apparent dissociation from Moses, by whom all were agreed God had spoken; and in having to associate with one who had the reputation of being the destroyer of the law of Moses, and whose undoubted end as a crucified companion of felons, brought him under the curse of the law of Moses.

It was true comfort that Paul administered to them, when he said to the Romans that his doctrine of Christ, so far from "*making void*" the law, "*established*" it. It was similar consolation for them to be told that Christ had said, "*Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfil.*" Writing directly to themselves, Paul had told them that the law, though Divine, was but "*a figure for the time then present*," pointing forward to Christ, in whom all its hidden significances had an end. This was his declaration on the subject as a whole. In the exhortation under consideration, he makes a particular application of it in a matter of detail. He reminds them that "*the bodies of those beasts whose blood was brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, were burned **without the camp**,*" involving the recollection that anyone availing himself of the ceremonial purification connected with the use of the ashes of the beast, had to go out of the camp to get at them: a typical foreshadowing of the fact that when the real purification from sin was provided, Israelites would have to go outside the national camp to obtain the benefit. In harmony with the figure, Christ "*suffered without the gate*," in being proscribed by the national authorities, and in being crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem. From this it was easy and natural to extract the farther figuration, by which the position of Jesus at the time of his crucifixion is made to represent the excommunicated and despised position of those of Israel who afterwards believed on his name. It was a natural climax to say, "*Let us go forth, therefore, to him without the camp, bearing his reproach.*"

We cannot apply this to ourselves in a direct manner this morning. We are not Jews, who in accepting Christ, have had to turn our backs upon what is called Judaism, and to go forth with courage to brave the reproach of those remaining in the camp. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which we are called upon to submit to such an ordeal. We have had to go forth from a certain camp, bearing the reproach and dating historically back to the work of the apostles in the first century. We have left that camp, with all the attractions that belong to a popular establishment. We cannot assemble with the respectable crowds that fill the commodious religious edifices that abound in every town. We cannot take part in their opulent arrangements, or join their imposing and comfortable services. We have chosen to step out of the flourishing throng; to desert the attractive festivals of popular faith; to stand aloof from the profitable associations of "the names and denominations of religion." We have accepted the obscurity and the dishonour of hole-and- corner meetings apart from the rich and powerful. It has been a hard resolution to take, not only because of the temporal disadvantages of our decision-not only because of the sacrifice of present gratifications of society, and the acceptance of present mortifications to the natural man and the spiritual too,

but because the system of religion around us accepts Christ by profession. If these systems said, "We reject Christ," our course would have been much easier; instead of that, they profess his name, and proclaim themselves his servants. It has in consequence been a great exercise of mind for us to consider whether we are justified in leaving a system professedly subject to Christ, and taking a step which by implication passes condemnation on them as an unchristian thing. But we have not faltered when all the facts were fully before us for decision.

We have learnt that the true "*house of God, which is the church of the living God, is the pillar and ground of THE TRUTH*" (1 Tim. iii. 15); and that men and systems may say, "Lord, Lord," and may even claim to have done wonderful things in his name, and yet have no claim to his recognition at his coming, by reason of their non-submission to his requirements. Consequently, we have asked—Is the religious system under which we were born "*the pillar and ground of the truth*"? A pillar supports, holds up: does the religious system support, hold up, the truth?" "Ground" gives a resting-place, a basis, a foundation: does the religious system act as a foundation, a resting-place for "the truth"? We have been able to answer this with an emphatic negative when we have come to know what "the truth" is.

This phrase "the truth" is very comprehensive. "The truth" we find to be made up of many things which require to be put together before we can have the whole thing so defined. For instance, it is true that God exists: but to believe that God exists is not to believe the comprehensive thing meant by "the truth." The Jews believed in God's existence: and yet Paul had "*continual sorrow of heart*" because they were not in the way of salvation. The truth is not only the fact that God exists, but that He has said and done certain things and given to us certain commandments. It is part of the truth that Christ was crucified: but to believe this of itself is not to believe the truth. Jews and infidels believe that Christ was crucified, but reject the truth of which that is an element. It is part of the truth that Christ rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples: but if these facts are disconnected from his ascension and the promise of his return to raise the dead and establish his kingdom, the belief of them does not constitute a belief of "the truth." So with every element of "the truth" by turns; they must all have their place in relation to the rest, or we fail to receive and hold the truth.

Now, when we try the system around us by this test, we find it is the very opposite of being "*the pillar and ground of the truth*." It lacks, yea rejects, the very first principles of the oracles of God. It teaches a triune instead of the one God: it asserts man to be immortal instead of mortal: it declares torment instead of death the wages of sin: it preaches the death of Christ as a "substitutionary" satisfaction of the Divine law, instead of a declaration of the righteousness of God (Rom. iii. 25) in the condemnation of sin in the flesh (Rom. viii. 3), as a basis on which the forbearance of God offers the forgiveness of all who recognise themselves "*crucified with Christ*" (Rom. iii. 25; Gal. ii. 20). It proclaims death instead of resurrection the climax of the believer's hope; it preaches heaven instead of earth as the inheritance of the meek. It affirms our going, instead of Christ's coming as the means and occasion of the promised reward. And so forth. The dissimilarities might be enumerated in other points. Instead of being "*the pillar and ground of the truth*," the religious system around us is the puller-down and scatterer of the truth. How, then, could we hesitate to "*come out from among them*"? It is part of apostolic doctrine that we are not to be identified with any who bring not the doctrine of Christ, whatever their profession (2 John 10; Rev. xiv. 9; Rom. xvi. 17). Consequently, we could not remain in popular fellowship without the danger of being responsible for their errors. This is the explanation of our position this morning in having

gone forth out of the popular camp, unto Christ, bearing the reproach incident in our professedly Christian day to a profession of his truth.

It is well also to recognise the fact that the principle which isolates us from popular communion isolates us also from the fellowship of all who reject any part of the truth. Some accept the truth in part, but are either unable or unwilling to receive it in its entirety. They believe in the kingdom but reject the Bible doctrine of death; or they hold the mortal nature of man but do not receive the restoration of the kingdom again to Israel; or they accept both, but deny the judgment; or believe in the judgment, but deny the kingdom; or accept all three, but reject the apostolic doctrine of Christ's nature and death, and so on. Such persons are generally what is called very "charitable": that is, they are willing to connive at any amount of doctrinal diversity so long as friendliness is maintained. They are lovers of peace. Peace is certainly very desirable when it can be had on a pure foundation: but the charitable people referred to are not particular about the foundation. They will compromise the truth in some one or other of its integral elements for the sake of personal harmony. This is a spurious charity altogether. We are not at liberty to relax the appointments of God. The exercise of "charity" must be confined to our own affairs. We have no jurisdiction in God's matters. What God requires is binding on us all: and the faithful man cannot consent to accept any union that requires a jot or tittle to be set aside or treated as unimportant. Such a man cannot consent to form a part of any community that is not *"the pillar and ground of the truth."*

There is just another side to this question which cannot be too well remembered, and that is that the possession of the truth in its entirety does not necessarily ensure acceptance with Christ at his coming. The Scriptures speak of *"those who **hold the truth IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS,**"* and declares that the end of such will be *"indignation, anguish, and wrath."* Consequently, no one should rest on the knowledge and belief of the truth as securing his salvation without failure. That knowledge is of great value to him. In the obedience to it in baptism it brings him into relation with Christ, who is the righteousness of God; invested with whose name he stands a forgiven man, *"purged from his old sins."* But he has a life to live after that, and Christ shall judge that life at his coming; and it will all depend upon his estimate of that life as to how he will deal with the person. He will give to every man *"according to his works."* In the case of some, he will *"blot their name out of the book of life."* He will take away their part out of the holy city. He will refuse recognition and dismiss the refused to the society of the adversary, at that time about to be *"devoured."* In the case of others, he will confess their names, and invite them to inherit the kingdom of God. There is no sane man who would not desire to be among the latter. There is a principle upon which admission is predicated. The doctrines of the apostasy have obliterated this principle. They teach that men have *"only to believe"* that Christ has paid their debts, and that they have nothing to do but believe that Christ died for them. Whereas the exhortation of Peter is to be *"diligent to **make our calling and election SURE**"*; that only *"if we do these things (which he had enumerated,) we shall never fall."* This is the uniform teaching of Christ and his servant Paul. Jesus says it is vain to acknowledge him unless we do what he commands (Matt. vii. 21). Paul says every man at the judgment seat of Christ shall receive according to that he hath done (2 Cor. v. 10); and that he who doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong that he hath done (Col. iii. 25). Consequently, it rests with us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. ii. 12), as obedient children, not fashioning ourselves according to our former lusts in our ignorance, but as He that hath called us is holy, so must we be holy in all manner of conversation.

There is a natural tendency to overlook this phase of the work of Christ, unless we are on our guard. The popular habit of depreciating the importance of doctrine, is liable to have the effect of shutting us up entirely to the fact that apart from a knowledge of the truth, we cannot be saved. We are in danger of shutting our eyes to the equally certain truth that a knowledge of the truth will be of no value to us if it fail to effectuate that purification of heart—that moral and intellectual assimilation to the Divine character which it is intended to produce in all who are called to the holy calling: we can only avoid this dangerous extreme by a habitual and meditative reading of the holy oracles. In this exercise, day by day, we shall be made acquainted with the full and noble breadth of the Divine work, in the practical transformation of men. We shall not fail to perceive that Christ made the state of the heart and the character of our actions the most prominent feature of his teaching. He preached the Kingdom of God it is true, and constantly did so: but this, only, as the framework of his instruction. The character of those who would inherit that kingdom, was constantly the burden of his speech to those around him. And we shall only resemble him and take part truly in his work, in proportion as we do the same. And what is more solemnly true, we can only hope for an entrance into his kingdom in the day of his glory if we are of the same mind and work as he. It is written, "*There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie*" (Rev. xxi. 27). Men—aye, even such as are called brethren, may forget or be indifferent to this meanwhile, but they will discover at last that the word of the Lord standeth sure, and that the gate of eternal glory will be barred against everyone who conforms not to the Divine standard revealed in the Word. The fact may appear a stern one, but its effect as regards the House of God will be only good and glorious: it will secure a perfect fellowship, composed of such as know God and delight in His praise, and in the delightful love one to another that glows in every heart that truly seeks His face.

(Taken from "Seasons of Comfort" Volume 1, pages 18-22 by Bro. Roberts.)