

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 24

1 John 3. —Beloved brethren and sisters, in this chapter, we are presented with many enriching thoughts, the contemplation of which will greatly help us in the way that we are going. The very first sentence presents us with one of them.

“Behold”—see, contemplate, look at the fact—“What manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God.”

Yes: this is great love. Who are we by nature? The descendants of barbarians; the living continuation of the outcast Gentiles, who are—

“Strangers from the covenants of promise, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.”

What are we in ourselves? The momentary creatures of earth, part and parcel of the common substance of which the planet is constituted—transitory forms of life emerged from the dust, with countless myriads of other living things and destined, in the ordinary course of things, to return hither again, and disappear for evermore. When we consider this, how heartily can we respond to John’s observation:

*“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on **us** that **WE** should be called the sons of God.”*

How precious appears that simple message of love which, by the gospel, has emanated from God through the apostles, calling the sons of the earth to be sons of Almighty power. Does it not fill us with a sense of our privilege, when we think of these things? And are we not helped to reconcile ourselves to the inevitable fact stated in the next sentence:

“Therefore, the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.”

To this, we must reconcile ourselves. It is one of the most necessary parts of our discipline that we should accustom ourselves to the isolated and deprived position in which a person is placed who makes the promises of God the portion of his life, and the law of God his rule. Such a position has been the lot of every true son and daughter of the Almighty from the commencement. Not that everyone professing to be such has shared it. There has, all along, been those who *“have a name to live and are dead.”*—(Rev. 3:1.) Such are those who *“live in pleasure.”* Paul declared such to be *“dead while they live.”*—(1 Tim. 5:6.) There is such a thing as choice in the matter. The scope there is for choice is the basis of responsibility. Every man shall reap as he sows. Moses, with splendid opportunities, both as to rank and wealth,

“Chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.”—(Heb. 11:25.)

The real victory, in our own day, is where a man, for Christ’s sake, forgoes **what it is in his power to have**. There is no merit in compulsory submission. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ lies here, that, for our sakes, he BECAME poor. He LAID DOWN his life. No man took it from him. —(John 10:18.) It was voluntary. He might have lived: he might have been well off, and lived in wealth, insensible to the claims of his Father; but he chose to be poor and to die. He left us an example that we should tread in his steps. —(1 Peter 2:21.) There may be times when we are called upon *“to lay down our lives for the brethren.”* (1 John 3:16.) In greater or less degree, it is in the power of all to choose great things or small things; pleasant things or bitter things. If for Christ’s sake, we choose the worst, we choose wisely, however much worldly-wise professors may pronounce against it; for he that loseth his life for Christ’s sake, shall find it; and he that saveth it shall lose it.

Some choose to save their lives and their comforts and their reputation now, at the expense of what the truth claims at their hands. Of such, it is not true that *“the world knoweth them not.”* The world knoweth them, and honoureth and delighteth in them. But those who

set themselves for the maintenance of “*the blessed hope*,” and the law of righteousness connected therewith, find a different experience, namely, the experience of John and the early believers. The world will not recognise them; the world will have none of them—it will put them far away from its company. This is bitter experience for the time, but there is a sweetness behind. We know we are in the company of the apostles who said the friendship of the world is enmity with God. —(James 4:4.) Besides, the fact is in itself a token for good, when we come to reflect on the situation. It is impossible to secure the friendship of anybody except on the principle of having like sympathies, or like interests. This is the basis of all friendship, whether individual or friendship in society. If, therefore, we were to find ourselves getting on with the world, there would be evidence of moral identity with the world, and, therefore, of estrangement from God, before whom “*the world lieth in wickedness*.” Those who are of God, will be affinitised to the things of God, and insulated from the things that are of the world. As Paul puts it,

“*They that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh, and they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.*”—(Rom. 8:5.)

The things of the Spirit are the seed of a glorious harvest, though like all seed, they look unpromising of such a result. “*Glory, honour, immortality*” will spring out of them in due time. —(Rom. 2:6-7.) He that soweth to the Spirit shall reap life everlasting. The things of the flesh are as poisoned treacle to the brainless fly. They are enticing and pleasant for the time, but pangs, corruption and death are in them, and will lay the fools on their backs at last.

“*He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption.*”—(Gal. 6:8.)

“*If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.*”—(Rom. 8:13.)

What matters it, then, that the truth brings suffering upon us at present—makes us current as fools—imposes upon us a social solitariness—thirsting for and capable of love and true society, but out of joint with the people around; living in the world but not of it: living in the world but not of it; strangers, and sojourners with the Man of Sorrows, who before us, walked through the world without belonging to it: we can well reconcile ourselves to the adversities of our position, when we remember all that is involved in the wonderful fact that we are called to be “*sons of God*.” Even in this present time, we are better off than the creatures of pleasure. No man is so substantially and everlastingly happy as the man whose faith and hope are in God. The “*pleasure*” of the world is not happiness. It lacks the first element of true enjoyment. There can be no joy without the fear of God, the love of man, and the answer of a good conscience. Happiness is the outflow of all the faculties in harmonious play. It is a quiet electric glow; it is not a thing that comes out in boisterous laughter: the joviality of the world is not the outcome of joy. It is the boiling-over of folly into the fire of vanity, generative of deadly odours. As Solomon has it,

“*The laughter (or the joy) of fools is as the crackling of thorns under a pot.*”

A very good simile; for when the thorns are burnt away, there is nothing left but ashes. Joy of that description desolates the heart, and leaves behind a sense of void and discontent. The quieter joys of sinners are no less unenviable. The joy of ambition, the joy of avarice, the joy of sensuality, the joy of successful business, the joy of literary dissipation, are all joys that consume the subject in a slow fire of wretchedness and destruction at the last. Even the gratification of the intellect in the paths of science is a limited satisfaction. In all these, the mind is without a bottom as it were. As John expresses it:

“*ALL THAT IS IN THE WORLD: the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but of the world, and the world passeth away.*”—(1 John 2:16-17.)

But “*joy in God*,” which is the privilege of saints, is a well of water through all the thirsty paths of life. It is a peace of God profound, passing all understanding, filling the heart and mind. Such is our heritage in the truth, if we sell it not by unfaithfulness. Therefore, we

can afford to be looked upon as fools. We have that good part which shall not be taken away. Our satisfaction has a solid foundation. We are not of the class who say, “We feel so and so; we cannot understand or explain it.” We can touch the springs of our satisfaction; we can lay bare the secrets of our joy; we can say “God has spoken; we know what He has said: we believe His word, and therefore are we glad.” Strong in this, we look at the world around, and we see that that which is now will not be. A hundred years will suffice to blot out everything that now is, —even the very houses, for houses are mostly built upon 99 years’ leases, because it is reckoned that at the end of that time, they are worth nothing. The grinding process of time is at work everywhere, blotting out and destroying all the ways of man. The busy, pompous fools of the day may laugh, and have it all their own way. They may jeer at the truth, and blaspheme the God of heaven and earth. They shall soon be as though they had not been; their voices will soon be heard no more; their very names will be forgotten. They shall be chased away as a vision of the night. In view of this inevitable fate of all men by nature, is it not the highest type of folly to throw away even **the chance** of so good a thing as that which is offered in the gospel—namely, a restitution of our weak, worthless selves from the all-devouring grave, to be rendered incorruptible, and glorious, and powerful, and put into possession of life unending, society immortal and unblemishable, joy ineffable, riches unsearchable, and honour everlasting?

We can even rejoice at the fact that the world knoweth us not. The world cannot know us; it could only know us if we lived as they live, and if we lived as they live, we should not be the sons of God. The man of the world lives for himself and the present. His great motto is “Look out for yourself; take care of yourself.” We need not wonder at this. If the future is kept out of view, nothing seems wiser than looking after your own interests. All around is a seething ocean of blighted and wretched humanity. The world’s life is a scramble—a desperate competition for existence, and where existence is secured, it assumes the character of an armed selfishness. The evil is great—too great in its magnitude to be cured by mortal man; and if there is nothing but the grave for us all at the end, the very hopelessness of the situation would incline one to let the world entirely alone, and get away into selfish ease and quiet, to spend, in some kind of enjoyment “the short allotted span.”

Selfishness is the logical result of the world’s philosophy; but when the truth comes, it opens out quite another view, and supplies a new motive. It exhibits a plan in actual process of development for the regeneration of the world, and gives a man a personal interest in the work. It shows him Infinite Wisdom at the helm of human affairs, in all their embittered course, and causes him to feel himself invited to cooperate with Eternal Wisdom in its designs. It gives him the hope of seeing, with his own eyes, the work triumphant, whether he live or die; and of himself sharing the blessedness for ages, covenanted for all the earth through Abraham and his seed. It shows him Jesus, the King of Glory in possession of all the earth, at the time appointed, the universal Master of mankind, in association with an order of men whom he has previously developed for himself, and who are to him in love, honour, obedience, and dependence, all that a wife is to a worthy husband, and much more than words can express, for he died for them, and has glorified them. It tells him that by faith and obedience he may earn for himself a position in this glorious community.

Seeing this, he says to himself “All that I can accomplish, in this present time, is not worthy to be compared with the good that is in store for those who please God; for however well I may succeed in life, I must, at the last, leave everything—but here is something that will be eternal.” If he believe, this consideration begins to weigh, for he says “I see that my relation to that future state will depend upon my present course, for the King of Glory, who was himself, in his mortal day, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, has said,

*“Except a man take up his cross and follow me, he cannot be my disciple;
“If a man loves anything else more than me, he is not worthy of me.”*

If the man be a truly reasonable man, he will give in to the force of this consideration, and begin to live with reference to the kingdom of God. This resolve will make its mark on his life, in many ways, and the world cannot understand it. The world thinks the man is going mad. The world lives next door, it may be, and wonders why you are not so particular about a fine house and fine clothing as you used to be. The world is not wise. A house is made for use and comfort, and a daughter of God acts on this view, and uses the things around her, for the family and the visitor, both of whom are much more precious than any article that can be purchased from a furniture dealer. The poor thing next door worships the shining toys, wears herself out in keeping them in due condition, wastes her time at the ignoble shrine, frets and fidgets at the inevitable moth and rust which doth corrupt, and at last lies down to die with a desolate mind, leaving her household gods to other and perhaps ruder hands. She learns, too late, the lesson that perishable things are only wisely used when made the means of useful life, and stepping-stones to a life that will never end.

The same fatality is observable in business. The man of the world sets before him the accumulation of substance as the object of life. To this he sacrifices many things, indeed, it may be said, everything. He sacrifices much comfort, much health, and all his time, and, therefore, all his life. He does not allow himself to take much enjoyment out of it. He blows the bellows of his business-fire all the while, and by-and-by, gets so inured to his work that he is unhappy away from the toil and the stir. Often, he does not hesitate to do dishonourable things when business is served by it. He tells any number of "white lies." He does not compromise himself with anything absolutely disreputable. On the contrary, he goes in for "respectability." He takes a "sitting" in a church or chapel, and perhaps subscribes to the charities, or even patronises some religious or educational movement. But, at heart, he is a money-grubber and a time-server. He consecrates all his brains and all his gains to the increase of his pelf, and dies at last with a blighted heart, leaving his substance to some spendthrift of an heir, or some poor relations, who become foes ever over the dividing of the spoil.

This is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God. In his eyes, the servant of Christ is a fool. He considers he is throwing himself away, in every sense; connecting himself with a "set" of fanatics and a "lot" of nondescripts, the very muck-rakings of society, by which he loses his standing and prospects in society; and "taking up his head" with wild "theological" rubbish, instead of turning his energies into the channels of business and respectability; and throwing his money away on "stuff," instead of adding to his capital and extending his business. Poor raving fool, this slave of mammon! He would put a different estimate on his righteous neighbour's career could he see what the man he despised has earned for himself: riches that cannot be computed, honour that cannot be tarnished, health that cannot be impaired, life that cannot end—a position compared with which the highest dignity and affluence of the present day are the mere tinsel of a clown.

When that position becomes developed, as it assuredly will be, the world will know who has been the wise man and who the fool. The world would go down on its knees to get possession of the good things promised to the righteous, if they were to be seen now, and had for the asking. The world would be very eager for God's things, if they were not hedged off by appointed preliminaries of faith, trial, and obedience. But, thanks be to God, they cannot so be had, and so they are safe from the unscrupulous herd of selfish monopolists. Without faith, it is impossible to please God; we now walk by faith and not by sight. It has pleased God to work upon that principle. And, indeed, what more signal opportunity could he have afforded us of honouring him than by inviting us to live a lifetime of endurance and well-doing upon the faith of His promises alone. And, as far as we are concerned, what greater joy could we have in store than that after a lifetime of travail and labour, and patience, and expectation, we should, at last, enter into rest.

It would not be half so joyful if we entered the kingdom either as soon as we come into existence, or after a life of ease and comfort, and riches and honour.

“Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

God’s plan of teaching men obedience through suffering, before exalting them to life and honour, acts as a drainer against the wicked nabobs of the flesh, who, in the same unprincipled style that they lay hold upon worldly things, would grab the riches of God into their own hands, and keep off the poor as they do now.

Considering all this, we can well afford to put up with the fact that the world—howsoever rich and howsoever respectable—knoweth us not, even as it knew him not. And our reconciliation to our lot will be all the more complete, if we consider what Jesus suffered and what he is now. He has had his time in the flesh. He has had his turn of the things we are enduring, and shall we shirk the trial he came through? Should we not rather prefer to be as he was? He was an outcast and neglected; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, who had not where to lay his head; who had here no continuing city and no substance he could call his own, and who was indebted for his sustenance to the angel-like ministrations of godly women, in whose hands God had providentially placed substance in trust—(Luke 8:2-3.)

We can see that we are, at least, in good company, if we are poor and rejected, and cast out, and despised. Not that we are to be content with this. Many are poor, and outcast, and despised, who are none of Christ’s, and will not be gathered in the day when he makes up his jewels. We must be the followers of Christ in more things than poverty and disgrace. It is an easy thing to attain to these conditions, and if these sufficed to ensure acceptance, the way that leadeth unto life would be broad and crowded indeed, and we might say “Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth unto life, and many there be that go in thereat;” for there are millions upon millions more poor than rich.

We must see to it that we keep Christ’s company, in all respects. Putting our supreme trust in God, making his promises our refuge, taking his truth for our portion and his service for our calling, we may then take comfort from our lowliness, knowing that our forerunner, our great example, the captain of our salvation, who was perfect in all these things, was lowly, *“despised and rejected of men.”*

“Let us consider the apostle and high priest of our profession.”

Of him it is recorded that the things of God were with him, all in all. He testified of himself that it was his meat and his drink to do the will of the Father. On the mere concerns and relations of ordinary life, he set very little value.

On one occasion, when the people told him his mother and his brothers were outside the crowd seeking for him, and desiring to see him, he replied—

“Who are my mother and my brethren?”—

And stretching forth his hands towards his disciples, he said—

“Behold my mother and my brethren; for whosoever doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister and mother.”

So, in this, we must keep his company, and not be like the children of the world, with whom family relations are all in all. The brother of Christ has a higher family circle than that of the flesh. The world does not understand this, but what matter? We must strive to do the will of God as Jesus did it. He did it till he was dead, and we must do it till we are dead, or, better still, *“till he come.”*

We must not be weary in well doing. There are some who enter upon the race with zeal, but, after a time, they slacken, and, in some cases, give it up and return to the grovelling activities of worldly life. Poor infatuated creatures! Let us beware of their fate. Let us remember that if we drop off at any point short of the end of the journey, we fail as much as if we had never commenced; as in the case from which Paul draws the illustration. A man

having entered a race cannot be a winner unless he perseveres to the mark; if he stops short anywhere, he will certainly not gain the prize. We must not allow ourselves to be put off the path of duty by anything or anybody, whether friend or foe, especially the former. There are few people put off the path by the foe; the effect of the foe's influence is to excite combativeness, and cause a sharp look out.

It is the influence of non-spiritually-minded friends that is to be dreaded. By such we are liable to be beguiled from the simplicity that is in Christ, and from our virgin attachment to him and our obedience to his commandments. This devil must be resisted with all our might, else we may fall from our steadfastness, and find ourselves unsuspectingly grovelling in the mire of the flesh. Such are mere doctrinarians, who promise liberty by their words, but are, meanwhile, themselves the servants of corruption. There is another way we may be damaged by friends when an enemy cannot touch us.

We naturally lean on friends; we take courage from their faithfulness; we comfort ourselves by their allegiance to Christ, but we mistake a friend, and suppose him to be more reliable than he is. Then, if there is a slip, we seem to partake of the stumble, and a man may be disheartened. Beware of friends in this sense. Lean not much. Lean on the rock that is eternal. Be discouraged by no man's faithlessness; and to this end, refrain from much joy at promising appearances. Practise moderation and patience. Let the guide of our own course be the word. Let this be the only one standard by which we live and move, and have our being spiritually. Let us, day by day, hold on by this book, and it will matter little then what position wife, or husband, or brother, or sister, father, or mother, or friends may take. Nothing shall separate us from the real thing. The real thing is not now here but in heaven and ahead. Our only safety in relation thereto consists in holding fast by the faith that is in God and in Christ Jesus our Lord, which can only be done by the daily, and diligent, and unvarying study of God's word.

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