

SUNDAY MORNING NO 63

We do well to obey the apostolic command, to forsake not the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is; and to exhort one another daily. We may not have many more opportunities . . .

We may well, therefore, lay special emphasis on the concluding words of the exhortation referred to, viz.,

“So much the more as ye see the day approaching.”

They act unwisely who suffer anything to come between them and this incumbent and profitable duty of assembling around the table, and sharing in the reviving influence of scriptural exhortation. And unwise will it also be to abate one jot of the force of that exhortation for any reason. The word has been trimmed, and softened, and weakened, during a long course of corrupt ages. Men-pleasing has been the great bane of gospel work. It is written: *“The fear of man bringeth a snare,”* and in no matter is this more apparent than in the treatment of God’s word. We see it illustrated in the systems of religion around us. The truth is suppressed and duty hidden behind a veil, for fear of the consequence of preaching things unpalatable to rich and pampered congregations.

There has always been a demand for smooth things since the days of Baal, and it is needless to say there has always been a large supply. The messengers of God have never been dealers in this kind of merchandise. The true prophets declared what God required of Israel, whether they heard or shut their ears. They had hard times in consequence, but they were not deterred. Most of them perished by sawing asunder or otherwise; but they will stand shortly in a glorious resurrection none the worse for their unpleasant usage. Christ testified of the world, that its works were evil, and in consequence, he was hated and destroyed; but who shall tell his glory when he reigns over all the earth, King of kings and Lord of lords, surrounded, supported, admired, glorified by the righteous throng, whom he shall have led to glory through the same fiery trial of faith in an evil world? Paul also had to say that his ministration of the word was incompatible with the pleasing of men. He says,

“If I yet please men, I should not be the servant of Christ;”

And again,

“Not as pleasing men but God, who trieth our hearts.”

Paul had to pay the price of this course in considerable unpopularity before he died—unpopularity, be it remembered, among professed fellow-believers, all of whom in the lesser Asia at one time, he says, were turned away from him. — (2 Tim. 1:15.) But who will say that Paul will regret his course in that day now at the door, when the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall acknowledge his faithfulness, and award to him that crown of life which the fearful, and the faltering, and the unbelieving will apply for in vain.

We must take our example from the good and not from the evil. We must, therefore, preach the word, be instant in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine. We must affirm constantly, that they which believe in God be careful to maintain good works. The adoption of this plan will be sure to call forth the disfavour of some who will talk about the standard being too high and the call to duty too incessant; but against all such murmurings a wise man will set his face as a flint. The exhortation is the apostle’s, the standard is Christ’s, and to tamper with either is a crime. Yes, but say some, “We can read it in the Bible for ourselves; we don’t want to be told about it?” What does that mean, but that the commandments are distasteful, and ought not to be spoken of by one to another? An enlightened heart, rejoicing as David in the statutes and commandments as found in the word, rejoices in them as re-echoed from the lips of a brother. And inversely we may

argue that those who object to them in oral exhortation, do not delight in or obey them as found written. But whether they are liked or the opposite, it is at our peril, as brethren, if we pare a single shred from them, or abate for a moment the voice of warning to conciliate whomsoever. Let us obey God rather than man, and His commandment is, to affirm these things constantly, and to exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

The commandment we have to do with in particular this morning is the one delivered by the Lord at the Passover which he partook with his disciples before he suffered:

"Remember me."

What we do this morning in the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup, is "*in remembrance*" of him. The commandment is binding and profitable to all true disciples. Absence from the table is one of the first signs of spiritual decay. No brother or sister having a true perception of all that is involved in the act, would suffer any controllable circumstance to come between them and this offering of love; or fail to find in it the sweet and refreshing exercise of their fealty to Christ and their communion with him. Where men are remiss in their attendance or weak in their relish, there is a worm at the root of their faith, and they have special need of the exhortation to—

"Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die."

The particular aspect in which Christ is presented on this occasion is the one expressed in the words,

"Christ our Passover."

It is Christ in the days of his flesh that is brought before us. This is the Christ continually brought before us in the psalms we read from morning to morning. The psalm read this morning looks at first sight as if it did not apply to him. The speaker in it says,

"Mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as an heavy burden, they are too heavy for me . . . I will declare mine iniquity. I will be sorry for my sin."

At first sight, it seems impossible that the Messiah should utter such language; but the difficulty vanishes when we remember that—

"The Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all."

Having our iniquities laid on him, he owned them as his own. He groaned under them as a burden too heavy to bear. He carried them into his grave and left them there, when God, in His great favour, raised him the third day. While he bore the burden of sins, the Spirit in David makes the Messiah speak of them as his own. We have a faint analogy to this in Daniel, who at the close of the seventy-years' captivity in Babylon, "*set his face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.*" In his prayer, he takes the iniquities of Israel on his shoulders so to speak. He says:

"We have sinned and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from Thy precepts and Thy judgments. Neither have we hearkened to Thy servants the prophets," &c.

Now Daniel was not guilty of this sin and rebellion. It is expressly declared of him that he was a man greatly beloved. But standing as Israel's intercessor at the close of their appointed affliction in Babylon, he takes upon himself the sin for which they had suffered.

So though Christ "*did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth,*" yet as the bearer of the sins of the world, he is made to speak and mourn as if the iniquities were really his own. This explains what is otherwise inexplicable, viz, that the confessor of sins "*more than the hairs of his head,*" is nevertheless able to declare his righteousness, saying,

"Keep not silence, O Lord, be not far from me. Stir up Thyself and awake to my judgment . . . Let them shout for joy and be glad that favour my righteous cause."

The Mother of Harlots, wrongfully imagining she preaches a more honourable Christ, gives us an immaculate Christ who was unaffected by our sins, and untouched with the feeling of our infirmity. Renunciationism practically does the same, in asking us to believe in a Christ “free” from the effects. We must beware of all plausible rehearsals of good words and fair speeches. The Christ of such speeches is not the Christ of the gospel. The Christ of God was a sin-laden Christ, bearing away the sin of the world. Under the load, “*he was a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief,*” as the psalms abundantly illustrate and the New Testament declares, eg,

“With strong crying and tears, in the days of his flesh, he made supplication to Him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.”—(Heb. 5:7.)

In this Christ, crucified and risen, we are crucified and risen, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of that God who is both just and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

Yet our final liberty depends upon our present conformity to his death, in a moral sense. We thus reckon, says Paul, that if one died for all, then were all dead (not dead before he died, as the Scripture wresters have it, but dead **when he died**), that they who live, after sharing that death in being baptised into it (Rom. 6:3), might not live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them and rose again. This is plain enough without explanation. We are to reckon ourselves dead to our past natural selves, but alive to God (Rom. 6:11), in the doing of those things that please him. In this we shall be unlike the world around, which lieth in wickedness. The cause of their wickedness is traced to its root in these words:

*“The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart that there is **no fear of God before their eyes.**”*

This is the conclusion produced in the speaker’s heart, by a contemplation of the transgression of the wicked. And a right conclusion it will be felt to be by every one pondering the same matter. The fear of God corrects and regulates a man’s actions when every other influence fails. Every other consideration at last loses force.

The fear of man may operate; but there come circumstances when there is no man to fear, and when self-interest overrides all. The love of honesty may prevail for a time; but in the wear and tear of human life, this is liable to be overborne by the many stronger influences to which every man is exposed in a wicked world. There is a great deal of fine talk about moral philosophy and the fine qualities of human nature, under various high-sounding titles; but it is found false in experience. The Bible alone is found true, which declares that there is no good thing in the flesh. Man is not made of the sort of stuff that yields excellence by spontaneous growth, or holds to excellence by inherent effort. His mind by nature is a blank, and all goodness has to be put in, and when put in, it has to be maintained in harmony with the constitution of his mind. Its hopes, and fears and loves have all to be engaged. The talk of virtue being its own reward, is an altogether inadequate philosophy. The word of God only is true. Get the fear of God into our hearts, and our whole being is thereby constrained in the direction of right. The hope of well-being, the fear of evil, the love of excellence, all come into play in connection with the promises and the threatenings. The difficulty is to get this fear implanted, because men habitually stand away from the only agency that can implant it. The word is the agency. Here we learn all that God is; all that He has done; all that He requires; all that He intends. A man cannot learn this by instinct. It must be founded on his intelligence. A fear of God apart from knowledge is mere superstition, and superstition is short-lived and unreliable. Constant familiarity with the holy oracles is the only thing that will implant that precious item of mental furnishing expressed by the scriptural phrase, “*The fear of God.*” Acquired in this way, the fear of God will be a robust, reasonable, dignified, enduring, and always-available sentiment. Cultivated apart from this, it is apt to become

irrational and hysteric, as among the sects, and slobbery and childish as in the extreme forms of Plymouth brotherism.

The fear of God, that will warm and purify the inner man, as the result of giving heed to the testimony, is founded on the recognition of the fact, that the presence of God, by the Spirit, pervades the universe; that He is not far from every one of us; that all things are naked and open to Him; that He discerns even the secret thoughts and intents of the heart. This fact is unintelligible only to the lowest forms of intelligence. A child thinks God cannot see it through the wall of the house; and there are many grown children. The telegraph has made us familiar with a fact hidden for ages from human ken, viz., the possibility of the instantaneous transmission of an invisible energy over immense lengths of metal in a moment of time. This helps the mind to realise that there are other laws and possibilities not yet discovered, and that never will be discovered by mortal man.

There are other modes of communication than through a wire. The whole ocean of spirit in which the universe subsists is a vital medium, by which everything is known to Him who dwells in heaven, and from whom it comes.

“The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.”

This helps us to fear God, especially when we know by His word that He is not an inattentive observer, but will cause every man to find according to his way. It helps us to realise that His ear is open to our cry, and that He knoweth what things we have need of before we ask Him. Hence faith is fed, even now; and when we extend our vision to the hope laid up for us in heaven with Christ, and to be brought unto us at his revelation—the hope of entire deliverance from the evil to which we are now subjected, and of an introduction to the glorious liberty of an actual fellowship, by spirit-nature, with the eternal Father—the fear of God becomes a great power by which we are cleansed and up-borne continually. Well may it be said,

“The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy, that is understanding.”

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Sunday Morning No. 63
Pages 61-64
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