

THE INSIDE OF THE TRUTH

Our readings this morning (Psa. 51, Rom. 5&6) take us to what we may call the inside of the Truth. The Truth has many outsides; and many people see only its outsides. Those who see it only from the outside and stand outside are not the children of its inner temple, who alone will be associated with its final triumph upon the earth. All the world sees its outside in seeing Christendom, which is a historic monument of the fact of its having been placed in the world. Coming nearer, Jews and infidels see its outside in seeing the memento of the cross everywhere, which has been placed in the earth and diffused in the earth by the work which God did by Christ in the first century. Nearer still, friend and foe see the outside of it in seeing the Bible everywhere. Nearer still, those see the outside of it only who see only its rudimentary doctrines. That man is mortal, that the Kingdom of God is coming, that the end of the age draws near, are all outsides of the Truth, comparable to the pillars and facades outside the temple which concealed the glory of God.

There is an inside to which we draw near in a special manner in the breaking of bread. It is an inside showing through the Psalm read and in the beautiful chapter from Romans. What is the essential characteristic of the Psalm? Distress towards God because of sin:

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness, according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin, for I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me.”

Now, what does this state of mind arise from? Its very kernel, without which it could have no existence is this: the belief in God, the recognition of His loving power and presence, the sense of His personal acquaintance with all our ways, and of His supreme and sovereign proprietorship and authority over us as His creatures. How could a man have any distress towards God because of sin who had any doubt as to the existence of God? Still less, how could such a man be animated by the love that David expresses towards God in all the Psalms? It is manifest that the first condition of this state of mind is knowledge. Love always comes after knowledge; never before. The same with fear. Who ever loved or feared a person they did not know of? It is morally impossible. To know God, therefore is the first thing. To know Him and to love Him, as the scribe said whom Jesus approvingly pronounced to be “*not far from the Kingdom of God,*” is better than all burnt offerings or ceremonial or technical compliances of any kind whatsoever. This is the inside of the Truth, the knowledge, and love, and worship of God, without which all knowledge and attainments are vain. Those who are not yet in harmony with “*the first and great commandment*”—“*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy soul, and all thy strength, and all thy mind*”—have not made a beginning in the course of real and acceptable godliness.

But it may be said, “How can I know and love a Being I have never seen and can never see, and of whom I can form no conception?” The answer is: by making His acquaintance in the ways that are accessible, availing yourself of which will end in imparting to you the palpable and satisfactory conception which you may desire. There are two methods of acquaintance which require to be conjoined to give a satisfactory result. They may briefly be defined as His works and His word—His works in creation, His Word in revelation. The former we can see—in small measure, it is true, but still in measure, we see one another, we see the earth and its varied products: we see heaven over our heads and its awe-inspiring grandeur of magnitude and order and glory. All these things pondered in their detail will lead us by intellectual induction to Him. They are reducible to invisible energy; once they were not; they have come out of invisible power and wisdom. They could never have come without the initiative and impress of supreme intelligence. Whatever name men may choose to describe this efficient force, they are face to face with God, as Paul declares in Romans 1:

“The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and godhead, so that they are without excuse.”

Men have only to use their reasoning faculties upon what they see to know that God exists. The eternal cause must be greater than the things produced. The intelligence out of which man’s

wonderful intelligence springs must be greater than man's intelligence. It is only the fool that says in his heart there is no God. A man of real brains could not be guilty of such intellectual folly.

But it is the Word of God in revelation that is the principal access to acquaintance with Him. Without this, we should only know that He must be; we should know His stupendous greatness and His terrible self-existent majesty: but what He might be, or what His purpose with us, or His wish concerning us, we could not know. With the attested Word of His revelation in our hands, the case stands entirely different. We have it in our power to make His full acquaintance. The history of His whole work with Israel, from Moses to Christ, and the full evolution of His mind and character in the numberless communications He sent to them by the Prophets, put it in our power to know Him so thoroughly as to come into touch with Him, to confide in Him, to pray the prayer of faith to Him, to love Him, and to find in His worship and in His praise our fullest joy, as David did.

The contemplation of nature causes us to know that it is pervaded by a unity of power, inscrutable but as real as gravitation or any other invisible force at work around—a unity containing all unities, a force embracing all forces. Revelation comes to the hungry intellect and says this unity of powers which the senses discern, is "*One Being, of Whom, and through Whom, and to Whom, and in Whom, are all things*"—even the God revealed to Israel and manifested in the Lord Jesus Christ, who "*worketh all things after the counsel of His own will,*" taking counsel and direction of none, and finding strength in Himself alone. By the two foundations of knowledge, we make the acquaintance of God as really as we become acquainted with any fact or friend; and He becomes with us a living power, dwelling with us and walking with us, inspiring our love and engaging our fear, not on any principle of a nursed imagination, but on the principle of manifest truth assimilated, and absorbed into the mental structure and condition.

Such a result implies and requires application of mind. All mental growth requires this. It is stressful enough often times, but it has its full reward, even in natural departments of study. To "*grow in the knowledge of God*" is a matter of constant command in the apostolic epistles. Its attainment is the sweet result of which Paul speaks of as "*the peace of God that passeth all understanding, filling the heart and mind.*"

Popular theology has spoiled most of us in this matter, by representing the knowledge of God as a thing of easy accomplishment, and in no way depending upon our own exertions. It is true that no exertion of our own would ever have enabled us to know God if God had not revealed Himself; but it is not true that He having revealed Himself, we require to make no effort to lay hold of the revelation He has given us. The very reverse is a truth constantly insisted on throughout the New Testament writings. The phrases are varied, but the inculcation of industry is uniform.

"Strive to enter;"

"Come unto me;"

"Be zealous and repent;"

"Give attention to reading;"

"Occupy till I come;"

"Take heed that your hearts be not overcharged;"

"Put on the new man;"

"Crucify the old man;"

"Always abound in the work of the Lord," etc.

The Spirit of Wisdom in the Old Testament exhorts us continually in a similar strain:

"Attend to my words;"

"Incline thine ear unto my sayings;"

"Apply thine heart to understanding;"

"Keep my words: lay up my commandments with thee;"

"Take fast hold on instruction: let her not go: keep her;"

"Say unto wisdom, thou art my sister;"

"Get wisdom: with all thy getting, get understanding;"

"Seek her as silver, search for her as for hid treasure;"

"Forsake the foolish and live and go in the way of understanding."

These counsels must commend themselves to us as based on the highest reason. How do men learn anything but by applying their minds? We are naturally ignorant of everything. Only those who study a matter become acquainted with it. If this is true of natural things, how much more true is it of

spiritual to which we are naturally averse. Wisdom is truly the principal thing, as Solomon avers; and yet what scarcity of taste there is for wisdom. Even in the comparatively low form of intellectual taste, the population is a wide waste of barrenness. There is little relish for anything beyond the mere sensationalism of eating, drinking, gossip fun, nonsense, wearing fine clothes, listening to frivolous music, or reading silly stories. There is little disposition to enquire into the reason of things; next to no capacity for appreciating and admiring wisdom in the constitution of all things in heaven and earth; and all the while life is so real, and every throb of the heart and thrill of the brain, and every phenomenon in nature has such a terrible earnestness of cause and effect underneath it all. If there is a lack of delight in wisdom on this low plane, no marvel the almost entire absence of it in the things pertaining to the knowledge of God. It is no extravagant statement in the Scriptures that says—

“Yahweh looked down from heaven to see if there were any that did understand, or that did seek after God,” and lo, *“They were all gone aside; none that did good; none that were righteous, no, not one.”*

Like Enoch, let us, *“walk with God,”* though surrounded by a population ripening for judgment and destruction. Like Noah, let us be *“found righteous”* (that is, in harmony with God’s requirements), though it involve us in a desolating minority of one to two millions. The end will justify the course that conforms itself to eternal wisdom.

The same general line of reflection is before us in another way in Romans 5:

“Being justified by faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

How impossible to enter into the thought of this comprehensive statement apart from the realisation of God. Its whole essence lies here. Almost every word of the sentence involves it. *“Justified”* means made just or right before Him in the forgiveness of our sins: how could such an idea arise apart from God Himself who justifies? *“By faith,”* means, by the implicit reception of the testimony which He has caused to be delivered concerning Christ (1John5: 10-13)—a faith which Paul tells us comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), which concerns things hoped for, and without which it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:1-6). How could there be such a thing as this justifying faith apart from God, whose spoken Word supplies the possibility of its exercise? *“Peace with God.”* what an empty phrase apart from God. How could a man value it who was in any doubt concerning God Himself? *“Have you made your peace with the plaintiff?”* would be an idle question, if there were no plaintiff. With a real plaintiff at work, it is very different. Peace with him represents a result for which perhaps you are willing to pay. *“Peace with God”* is beyond all price in view of God’s existence and displeasure with sin. It would not be likely to be thought much of by the man who doubted the one or the other.

“Through our Lord Jesus.” This is where Christ stands in the apostolic scheme of things—not merely as a teacher of excellent duties, but as an effectuator of peace between God and man. As Paul says, in Eph. 2:14,

“He is our peace who hath made both (Jew and Gentile) one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in his flesh the enmity . . . that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross.”

The systems of human wisdom around us that would reduce Christ to a moral reformer, however eminent—the urger and exemplar of excellent principles of action for men—would give us a Christ that is not the Christ that Paul preached. He was all and ten times more than moral philosophy could ever ascribe to him. He was *“the way, the truth, and life”* in the sense defined in Paul’s preaching. *“We,”* said Paul, *“preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God”* (1 Cor. 1:24): *“by him, all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses”* (Acts 13:39). In this conception of Christ as the *“One mediator between God and man,”* we see also how essentially God is the root of the whole scheme of the gospel, for where could mediatorship arise, either as a valuable or a conceivable institution if it were not for the eternal God, the Creator of all things, who appointed the ministry of reconciliation, *“to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them?”* (2 Cor. 5:19).

“By whom (our Lord Jesus Christ), also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand.”

By Christ, and in no other way.

“No man cometh unto the Father but by me” so Christ declared.

“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” so the Father demanded.

“There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved” so the apostles testified.

And this is what we Christadelphians offend our neighbours by re-echoing and earnestly contending for, as against the easing and pleasing thoughts of our day and generation, which more and more tend in the direction of making everybody right and everybody safe—Mohammedans, Brahmins, Confucians—and none in such danger as those who maintain *“the narrow way* (proclaimed by Christ and the apostles) *that leadeth into life.”*

Two more thoughts by way of conclusion. *“Peace with God,”* to be of any value, must be peace from Him towards us rather than peace in our own hearts that may not be reciprocated by Him. A man may think well of his own case when God thinks otherwise. As the Scriptures say,

“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”

The only peace of final value is the peace that God feels towards those with whom He is well pleased. He has made known how we can please Him; and it is for us to conform to what He has required, whatever men may think, or whatever we ourselves may feel. It does not depend upon our feeling at all. We may be in much tribulation, and in much fear and trouble; but if we conform to the revealed Word of God, we shall please Him and have peace with Him through our Lord Jesus Christ. This will be better than having happy and glorious times at revival meetings, to discover at last that we have displeased God by refusing His testimony, and neglecting the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The last thought is the one suggested by the words,

“Access unto this grace wherein we stand.”

“Grace” is favour. The whole arrangement is one of favour, and not of claim or obligation at all. It is based on forgiveness—

“Forgiveness freely by His grace.”

God was not obliged to forgive because Christ died. He required Christ to die that His righteousness might be declared, and His name exalted; and that man might be thoroughly humbled before He felt at liberty to exercise the prerogative of mercy unto eternal life. But being dead, it was of grace that He raised him, and it was of His grace that he caused repentance and remission of sins to be preached in his name to all who should submit in the broken and contrite heart in which he takes pleasure. We are *“justified freely by His grace”* in the whole arrangement. Through Christ, we have access to it, in the assumption of his name in baptism, and in communion with him all through a life of faith and obedience. When we have done all, we have only obtained access to a favour. Men who talk of *“claiming”* eternal life as a right, have not learnt the way of God.

“By grace we are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

By grace we rejoice in hope of the glory of God, to be manifested upon the earth when *“the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him.”*

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