

Who are my Brethren?

The thoughtful solemnity with which we are endued when thus memorializing the Lord's death and resurrection is the outcome of sober and rational reflection upon the relationship which we thereto sustain.

We have been "bought with a price"; hence in the capacity of servants, we are fulfilling our Master's commands.

Speak "our own words" we dare not, for the Lord's point of view must be ours.

Being in covenant relationship with Christ we are deeply concerned with the enquiry as to what position we occupy in relation to certain requirements and injunctions which through his apostles he has plainly formulated for our guidance and obedient fulfilment. In connection with this matter, a direct, practical question obtrudes itself upon our attention, *viz.*, "WHO ARE MY BRETHREN?"

A serious query this, and withal one which plumbs the very depths of the mind.

Jesus, whom we have assembled to remember, *he* asked the question and answered it. Said he: "Who is my mother, and who are my brethren? Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother".

What a test! What a standard! In the light of it let us carefully visualize our position in the Truth—our standing as individuals and as an ecclesia. Are you his brother? Are you his sister? Are we his brethren? In considering this question we will review ourselves; to answer it we must examine ourselves. This is as it should be. The word of exhortation should be provocative of silent searching, introspective thought. IT SHOULD MAKE US THINK.

The mere mouthing of pious platitudes is not exhortation; the exposition of doctrines, the explanation of moral laws does not constitute exhortation. The mere citation of Scriptural examples is also a bad substitute for exhortation. In short, the MERE reproduction of Scriptural doctrines, laws and examples is but a stage removed from parrot fashion sermonizing. Scriptural doctrines and laws are on record for us to believe, maintain, obey, and jealously defend.

Scriptural examples are illustrated for us pertinently to apply and practically to emulate. To read of the examples of faith and works contained in the Word of God is very interesting and spiritually instructive; but if we stop there, those very examples are in our case abortive.

Their mere theoretical acceptance minus our individual application of them is as insipid and useless as salt without savour. This is also true in respect of ecclesias; for what is an ecclesia but an aggregation of individual members? And is not an ecclesia itself a compound unit of the Body corporate? God, then, placed these examples on record for us to be guided by; consequently, if therefrom we are to gain the good they were designed to give us, we must apply them to ourselves, our brethren, our circumstances, and our position and dealings in and with the Truth.

The solemn question persists. Can we not hear our Elder Brother ask: "Who are my brethren?" Are not our ears attentive to the cry of the Master—"Who are *my servants*?" Do we not sense the query of the Good Shepherd—"Who are *my sheep*?"

Saith he: "My servants obey my voice";—"My sheep follow me".

He obeyed in every case the God of heaven; he strictly observed to do the "written Word". Do we obey? Are we following him? Do we observe to do ALL that the "written Word" dictates? I think not. The Bible speaks of Israel after the flesh and Israel after the spirit; it contains the laws to which the former were subject and also those to which the latter profess allegiance. It will be instructive to compare the one with the other, for a considered comparison of certain laws given by Moses to natural Israel with certain commands delivered by Jesus and the Apostles to us, will perchance enable us to clearly see where we stand.

Of the laws given to Israel after the flesh we read thus in Deut. xiii. 12-15: —

"If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities, which the Lord thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying, Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known; Then shalt thou enquire, and make search, and ask diligently, and behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you; Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, . . ."

Here we perceive that laws which were administered by Moses, required any individual Israelite who happened to hear of a departure from the Truth in a distant city, to make diligent enquiry, and if finding the report true, to call the attention of the whole nation of Israel to the matter, and if non-repentant, that city was to be cut off, or destroyed.

How thoroughly these laws were carried out, is manifest from a study of Judges, chapters xix. and xx. The wife of a certain Levite living in Gibeah was, by certain wicked men of the tribe of Benjamin, cruelly done to death. In obedience to the law, he, after the fashion of those days, severed the corpse into twelve pieces and sent them to the twelve tribes of Israel, thus dramatically calling the attention of the entire nation to the sin. As a result the men of Israel gathered themselves together against Gibeah, demanding that the murderers be given up for punishment. But the tribe of Benjamin refused to give them up. What did the nation then? Did they "pay as little attention as possible to passing" evil? No; they forced the matter by making war upon the tribe of Benjamin. At the first clash of arms the recalcitrant tribe was victorious and Israel lost 22,000 men slain.

The Lord commanded them to attack Benjamin again (Judges xx. 23). This they did and were again defeated, losing another 18,000 men.

Then stood Phinehas before the ark of the Lord and said, "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin, my brother?" The Lord replied: "Go up; for tomorrow I will deliver them into thine hand".

Again they essayed the castigation of the disobedient tribe, this time with marked success, for with the exception of 600 men the tribe of Benjamin was exterminated.

Was this campaign a righteous one? Yes, undoubtedly; for God commanded it in order that a "vital principle of truth and righteousness might be vindicated", and that His "holy, just and good" law might be upheld.

THESE: THINGS WERE: WRITTEN FOR OUR LEARNING.

We may liken the ecclesias in spiritual Israel to the cities of natural Israel; only of course the law of Christ must govern our application of the example cited. In obedience thereto we must abstain from all carnal warfare. Spiritual warfare we must carry on, having as our sword the Word of God.

To warn individuals or ecclesias in error is our first duty; if they give not heed, but continue unrepentant in doing or condoning evil, then we must with the Spirit sword cut them off, allying ourselves with faithful Israel.

There is a further lesson to be learned: when the Lord commanded all Israel to fight against Benjamin, some did not do so; they, as it were, "sat on the fence", they came not up to Mizpeh as commanded. What happened? Twelve thousand men were sent to Jabesh Gilead which was thus disobedient, and they smote it with the edge of the sword—cut it off. Similarly, an ecclesia, itself quite sound, which refuses to participate in the cutting off of an unrepentant errorist ecclesia, must itself be cut off, or withdrawn from; for they that bid such an ecclesia God-speed by sending intelligence and professing "nominal" fellowship, are "partakers of their evil deeds" (2 John 7-11).

Anent this matter of spiritual life and death, the apostle Paul speaks without equivocation thus: "Have NO fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness".

Jesus commended the Ephesian ecclesia because among other things, they could not "BEAR" those that were evil, and because they "TRIED" those which said they were "apostles" and found them "liars". The Philadelphian ecclesia was also praised because, in the words of the Lord, "THOU HAST KEPT MY WORD".

In this age of compromise, tolerance of error, and looseness of fellowship, the Lord's question, "Who are my brethren?" must by faithful brethren be thus formulated: "Who are they with whom we can associate in holy, pure fellowship?" To which we answer: "Those who, regardless of secondary considerations, without fear of consequences and without any 'reservations' OBEY implicitly the command of the One Master, Christ Jesus, who said, 'If ye love me KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS'." In so saying we refrain from anticipating the verdict of the Judge when He cometh, and also adopt a necessary and Scriptural safeguard.

Those who nullify the law of Christ by sentimental sophisms and pratings about "Christian charity", Dr. Thomas dubs "enemies to Christ". Says he: —

"The greatest and most dangerous enemies to Christ are those who pretend to be his friends, but are not faithful to his doctrines; and they are unfaithful who, from any motives of personal interest, would weaken the point of doctrine, or soften it for the gratification of their natural feelings, or for fear of hurting the feelings of the enemy, and so affecting their popularity with him."

Accordant with those of the Doctor are the following words from the pen of bro. Roberts: —

"The man who says that because we are to live in love, therefore we are not to find fault with other people's opinions, and must not separate ourselves from sincere and pious people, who may, in our judgment, deny the Truth, is a destroyer of the Word; he handles the Word of God deceitfully."

This ecclesia we exhort and admonish: Bid not "God-speed" to those in error, and be not like Jabesh Gilead, but now that the attention of spiritual Israel has been called to the error in certain ecclesias, which are yet unrepentant, do your duty as true soldiers of Christ, in love to the Truth and in reverence to God.

One of the pathetic figures portrayed by Bible history is that of Eli, the high priest of Israel, whose love for his sacriligious sons was greater than that for his God. The law required that he, as high priest, should deliver up his wicked sons to be cut off for their evil doing. Instead, he, in the sentimental sense, loved them, and contenting himself with a mild rebuke, tolerated their corruptions of the law, and incurring the displeasure of God, died a broken-hearted old man. This state of being

broken-hearted he brought upon himself, for although he was a good man, he lacked that stern scrupulosity necessary to the strict carrying into effect of God's law.

Tender-heartedness is a beautiful characteristic when exercised in harmony with God's will; but when it is allowed to sway the mind in directions contrary thereto, it becomes a dangerous, if not fatal, influence towards error. Had Eli acted as did his predecessor Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, he would have pleased God. "But", it is objected, "he forced matters and went to extremes".

Well, in cutting off Zimri and Cozbi, who wrought evil in Israel, he DID RIGHT.

In times when the law of the Lord was flouted and disobeyed, His faithful servants invariably "went to extremes" and "forced matters".

Look at Ezra and Nehemiah when the Israelites married strange wives!

Reflect upon the angry zeal of our Lord and Master when driving out the temple-defiling money-changers!!

Consider the stern, drastic measures employed by Peter in dealing with the insincerity and falsity of Ananias and Sapphira!!

Did God approve of these things? Yea, verily. We are commanded to be patient? Yes, the law of Christ requires us to be patient—BUT NOT WITH ERROR!!

We must be patient unto the coming of the Lord *in the sense of waiting for him*.

Are we from this to infer that procrastination and limp indecisiveness in dealing with a wrong position regarding error, is a justifiable procedure? We trow not: such nonsense is surely unworthy of our credence. Our duty as an ecclesia is clear in the light of the Written Word.

We must withhold our fellowship from ecclesias in England and America who tolerate and fellowship error and those who hold it.

A closing word. A powerful, impelling sense of duty has literally forced us to speak thus plainly. To do so is the result of great effort and to us, if not to you, the occasion of much sorrow.

Follow the example of time-servers and exponents of expediency, we dare not; such a policy is badly disguised clericalism, and diametrically opposed to Scripture, precept, and example.

We exhort you, BE SCRIPTURAL; for if you fail, a negative answer may be returned to the question concerning you at the judgment seat of Christ, viz., "Are you his brethren"?

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