

CHOOSE GOD---

ACCEPT CONSEQUENCES

We shall find instruction, help, and consolation in the beautiful Psalm of David, which we have been singing—the Psalm in which he declares his highest mental hunger to be a hunger after God. We have just sung *“My soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is.”* How few men are to be met with on earth who are in this state of mind towards God; yet it is the state of mind that makes a man a godly man, and it is the godly man that God chooses for Himself. It is a reasonable state of mind when the claims of reason are fully seen. God is necessarily the highest object of desire with a mind made to reach after the delight in the infinite and the perfect and the everlasting. Such is the ultimate desire of the human mind when developed to its full capacity.

But this desire is not only little developed by the order of things at present active on earth, but it is even balked and violated when it is developed. There is nothing to gratify it except the silent proclamation of God in nature, and the manifestation of Him by revelation which has been preserved in the Bible. There is no apparent activity and no apparent guidance among men except that of men. The earth seems given over to unchallenged man, so that he who is the most unscrupulous is the most successful, provided he is also the most energetic and the most cunning. God apparently takes no notice and no part. Prayer is apparently a futile appeal, and faith the fantasy of a fool. “Oh, that God would speak!” is the natural exclamation of the godly man. If this state of things were to continue without interruption, godliness would soon be an effete superstition. God has not hitherto been without interruption. God has not always been silent, and He will not always preserve the present silence. The fact of His having spoken is too apparent to be doubted when all the proofs of it are in view; and the promise that He will speak again is too plain to be mistaken, while the intimation that He would be silent at this time is too direct for that silence to be misunderstood. While it continues, it is a trying experience, causing the intense thirst that David describes. Its continuance for a while is a necessity in preparation for the day when it will end in joyful streams in the desert. *“To see Thy power and Thy glory”* was David’s strong desire in which he has the company of everyone of like mind.

“Better is Thy love than life,” exclaims he. If we are tempted to ask how can this be, we may see the fullness of our answer if we reflect. Life is only a transient thing, hanging on conditions that cannot last, whereas to be loved of God, who is everlasting, is to be made sure at last of every gift and every good. For a man to possess the love of God in the sense of being loved of God is to be the subject of the highest possession possible to a created being, for the Lord will at last withhold no good thing from such. To such, the statement “All things are yours,” will ultimately apply in the most absolute sense. God requires our love as the condition of the continuance of His. *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,”* is the first and the great command. We must come to this if we are to come to final good. Surely it ought to be easy for a man to love God. Love is invariably drawn out by excellence. What excellence lacks in the Eternal? Yea, what excellence is there that has not its first cause in Him? What has man in the way of wisdom or strength that he has not received? To love God is to love the perfect, the only wise, and good, and true, the incorruptible and glorious, powerful and kind, incorporate in a self-subsistence which never began and cannot end. In God is the fountain of life, the source of all power, mentality and existence. The love of Him seems the inevitable effect of the knowledge of Him; and the knowledge of Him is within the

reach of every man who has eyes to see and ears to hear what is manifest in nature and history.

How dreadful to neglect Him: It seems not so just at any one moment. The knowledge of Him—the love of Him---the obedience to Him, seem shadowy things to those whose senses are engrossed by the proximate expressions of physical life. How real and of what operative potency they appear, when seen in their ultimate connections! You look back upon the beginningless past from which, though beginningless to Eternal Power, the wonderful present has emerged with a beginning. You look around upon the vast and beautiful universe in which we fill so small a place, and to whose sustenance we contribute less than nothing. You look forward to the endless futurity in which some things will last for ever. If you are capable of reflection, you must, on such a survey, enquire, what is the explanation of it all? And when you have enquired and reflected your utmost, and excavated your little deepest into the foundation of things, you are forced home at last by the relentless stress of reason upon ---God.

How dreadful it is to forget God, our reading from Jeremiah shows us. If ever there was a people upon earth who might presume upon exemption from evil, or a land that might be considered safe from desolation, that people and land were Israel and the Holy Land. Israel was a nation not only chosen of God, but created by God, and delivered and guided by God with visible out-stretched arm, as a nation never had been. He rescued them from Egypt by miracles, signs and wonders as had never been performed on behalf of any people. He fed them in the wilderness with manna from heaven: opened the rock for their thirst, and gave them a law which left nothing to devise or improve. He spoke to them by prophets and guided them by captains of His own direct appointment and illumination. As David said, *“He hath not dealt so with any people.”* Yet here in Jeremiah, we have things to make the heart break. The land is harried by invading hosts. A cloud is on all affairs. Uncertainty and fear are everywhere. There is no cheering message from God; on the contrary, tidings of woe, presage of calamity, forecast of evil, are daily reported from His mouth by Jeremiah. At last, the Chaldeans, *“that bitter and hasty nation,”* prevail over Jerusalem, give its people to the sword, its buildings to the flames, and a miserable remnant to captivity. On their departure, the city sits solitary that was full of people. A beautiful and fertile neighbourhood becomes a wilderness. The ways of Zion do mourn; none come to the solemn feasts; all her gates are desolate. From the daughter of Zion all beauty is departed. She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks. Among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her.

It is the explanation of this strange picture that brings home to us the dreadfulness of forgetting God. The Bible is full of the explanation. It is not only that Jeremiah plainly says, in his lamentations: *“Jerusalem hath grievously sinned, therefore she is removed,”* but the messages of the prophets incessantly re-echo what was written by Moses in the prophetic song which God directed him to leave as his dying gift to the nation. Moses said (Deut.32: 18), *“Thou hast forgotten Me days without number....I will bring upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them, because I have spoken unto them and they have not heard, and I have called unto them and they have not answered.”* *“Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my words? saith Yahweh.”*

Now, we should make a great mistake if we did not recognise the modern application of these principles. If it was a sin against God, which was purged only in the terrible deluge of blood and fire which at last overwhelmed Israel at the hands of the Romans—namely, that the people *“snuffed at”* the divine institutions, and said, *“What a weariness is it”*—and found agreeable stimulus only in buying and selling and getting gain—are we to suppose it is a matter of indifference to Him that a precisely similar state of things prevails in the

European community that is called by the name of Christ? Any such supposition is a delusion, which will be expelled from anyone's mind who fully realises the statement that *"the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel,"* and who has fully discerned the meaning of the apocalyptic hieroglyph which exhibits Him in the act of treading the wine-press, choked with the ripe bunches of human wickedness.

The greater danger is that we may be drawn into conformity with the evil principles and the evil ways of a system of society that is in reality ripe for divine judgement. As with Israel in the days of the prophets, so now; this receiving instruction is the last thing that the people have any taste for. It is the most unpopular thing you can propose to people that they should "receive instruction in the ways of God." "Give us entertainment, give us fun—anything but your long-faced, hypocritical cant about religion." This is how the popular sentiment runs, and the clergy do not help to stem the current at all. They run with the stream. They speak smooth things. They say all is well. Like the false prophets spoken of in Jer. 25:17, *"They say still unto them that despise Me, Yahweh hath said, ye shall have peace: and they say unto every one that walketh in the imagination of his own heart, no evil shall come upon you."*

But the truth of the matter remains unchanged—that *"the world lieth in wickedness"* (1John 1:19), that *"all that is in the world, the lust of the eye, and the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, is not of the Father"* (1John 2:16), and that it is the part of the friends of God to love not the world, even as Christ was not of the world (John 17:14). The voice of God calls, *"Receive My instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it."* The voice of God calls, *"My son, attend to My words, incline thine ear to My sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart."*

We have therefore to choose between the ways that God has condescended to prescribe, and the ways that are pleasing to a foolish generation, but hurtful in their working out. Why should you hesitate? God's ways are pleasant now, and purely good at last. Man's ways are ugly and evil in the upshot. In Jeremiah's days it had to be said, *"From the least of them, even unto the greatest of them, every one is given unto covetousness: and from the prophet even unto the priest, every one dealeth falsely...Among My people are found wicked men: they lay wait as he that setteth snares: they set a trap: they catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great and waxen rich. They are waxen fat: they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked. They judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper: and the right of the needy do they not judge."* This is exactly the state of things in the Gentile world of the nineteenth century. Wicked men prosper by their "exploitation" of their fellow men, and by shutting their ears to the cry of the needy. Righteous men looking on are liable to weary at the sight, and to think it is no use for them to persevere in ways that do not "pay." They are liable to say "All seek their own, and so will I." Oh listen not for a moment to such promptings of the flesh. "Brave the battle, fight the fight, welcome waits the victory gained." On all sides, it is "grab, grab, grab," but follow things to their issue, and what comes of the grab, grab, grab? Death, death, death. *"Be thou faithful unto death."* What are you afraid of? Of coming to poverty? Is it the first time the servants of God have been poor and needy men, and has not God promised to be with us, even as we pass through the fire and water of affliction? Are you afraid of affliction? How in that case do you hope to find place when all affliction is past, among those whom John saw in Patmos, who were described to him as those who had come out of great tribulation? Is it unpopularity and disgrace that you are afraid of? Have you considered that Jesus whom we seek to follow was *"despised and rejected of men?"* How can you hope to be

exalted with him if you do not share his preliminary dishonour? Is it death you fear? Have you never heard of *“the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God and for the testimony which they held...who loved not their lives to the death?”* Are you or are you not of those who would *“rejoice to be counted worthy to suffer shame for his name?”* If so, you cannot greatly dread the prospect of death indirectly through obedience in non-persecuting times like ours.

Let us put away all these illusions and depressions which belong merely to the unenlightened mind of the flesh. Let us bravely and thoroughly accept the position to which God calls us—however humiliating and painful—even if it is meanwhile to ruin and death. Let us burn our boats. The sacrifice is not nearly so difficult when we frankly accept it in all its issues. It is only when we try to serve God and mammon that we find the task too hard. Christ says it cannot be done, and you may be sure his word will work out truly in your experience. Choose mammon, or choose God, but do not mix the services. Could enlightened reason hesitate in the choice? There is not a single reason absent from the argument that would incline us to the service of wisdom. It is God that calls; what an honour to obey such a call. God only has a right to call, for He made all things and understands all things, while poor man is so shortsighted and possesses nothing for long; what a satisfaction to have sound reason for our policy. He calls us to suffering and death, not for the sake of suffering and death, but only as a necessary preparation for *“glory honour and immortality.”* There is nothing but good in the end of obedience—nothing but evil in the end of refusal.

How great that goodness is we may learn from the transfiguration of which we have been reading. It was a vision of *“the Kingdom of God come with power.”* Moses, the dead, Elijah, the living, appear in glory, with Jesus, the transfigured. The Man of Sorrows appeared no longer such in the brightness that illuminated him and his companions. His very clothes, ordinary woven stuff, shone with a glistening whiteness, exceeding the highest art of the fuller. In this we may see what God can do with the common stuff of our mortal nature when *“He shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body,”* when this corruptible shall put on immortality and we shall all be changed. The prospect is not an illusion: it is not a dream or an idea. It is the declared and authenticated purpose of God, proclaimed by the apostles, guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ, and supported in a hundred ways by the character of the Bible and the entire history to which it stands related before and since its publication. We have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for He is faithful who hath promised. Cast not away your confidence which hath great recompence of reward. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come and will not tarry; and who shall tell the joy that shall be the portion of those to whom he will say, *“Thou hast been faithful in a few things, be thou ruler over many things, enter into the joy of thy Lord.”*

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