

A Sunday Morning Exhortation (28)

Strangers and Pilgrims

It would be difficult to read the First Epistle of Peter without being impressed with the fact that the Truth is intensely practical. Of ritual and ceremony, the Truth has very little, as witness our simple, unostentatious gathering around these emblems this morning; but its influence upon the life of the individual cannot be too highly estimated. Every moment of our waking hours we are surrounded by the obligations of the Truth. Thoughts, speech, actions, all come within the sphere of its influence. There is not a circumstance in which we could find ourselves, which is not bounded by the commandments of Christ.

How imperative, therefore, that we should be thoroughly conversant with all that it written. The Divine Law should be so deeply impressed upon us that we act almost intuitively according to its principles, under all conditions. This highly desirable state of mind does not come all at once. It is the result of prayerful, painstaking, perseverance in reading and meditation, “here a little, there a little, line upon line, precept upon precept.” By this means alone will the commandments of Christ become the controlling force in all that we think, say, and do.

The First Epistle of Peter is rich with spiritual food. It contains all the vitamins necessary for the development of a strong, healthy man in Christ Jesus. Let us partake liberally of the nourishment it affords.

The opening words inform us of those for whom the Epistle was intended. “Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ to the strangers scattered...” The language employed is expressive of a profound truth concerning the children of God. All of us were once “strangers from the covenants of promise,” but by acceptance of the Gospel of Salvation we are no more “strangers and foreigners but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” Yet we are still strangers. Like the fathers of old, we confess that we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth. We recall the words written in the Psalms concerning our great prototype, “I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children.” The Truth separates us from relatives, friends, neighbours and business associates. We suffer reproach, ignominy, and ostracism, and we feel the position keenly. Such circumstances sadden and depress, but let us take comfort from the glorious fact next mentioned by the apostle. It concerns a relationship we sustain, which far eclipses the closest earthly ties.

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” We are known of God, He has invited us into His circle, not merely as His creatures, not even to be just His servants, but to be His Sons and Daughters—His Elect. “I will be a Father unto you,” is the promise of the Lord Almighty. What consolation this truth affords! What matters if the world derides us, if our brethren misunderstand and misjudge us, “the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal; the Lord knoweth them that are His.” None can remove us from his keeping, nor deprive us of his promised reward. The apostle says (v. 5), “We are kept by the power of God

through faith unto salvation.” This privileged position in which we stand forms the basis of the practical exhortations which abound in the Epistle.

"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind,... as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance, but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy..."

As far as lies in the power of frail, human nature, we must manifest godlikeness of disposition. All down the ages the Voice of God has spoken to His people, “I will be sanctified in all them that draw near me.” It was the underlying lesson of all the enactments of the Law of Moses, from which the apostle Peter makes this quotation,

Israel were enjoined to be a separate people, to be pure in heart, and clean in mind and body. The keynote of the Law was, “Holiness to the Lord.” It appertained to their worship, their public and private lives. The first lesson that an Israelite had to learn was that naturally he was unclean, and unfit for approach to the Almighty. His sanctification was effected by the sacrificial blood, as Paul declared, “Almost all things by the Law are purged with blood.” Many other features of the Law enforced the same need for purification—the consecration of the priests, their attire, the washings at the laver, the anointing oil, and the burning incense. Moreover, the laws enjoining holiness extended to family life, domestic relationships, personal hygiene, habits, and customs.

Now the Apostle Peter bids us to look at this pattern as the standard of holiness required of us. We have been sanctified by the blood of Christ, typified in the wine before us. Verse 18 declares:

"Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things...but with the precious blood of Christ,"

and in verse 22, the apostle links this fact with the purification effected in us, “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth.” But the holiness required of us does not end in what has been accomplished in Christ. We have to aspire, like every faithful Israelite, to the holiness and purity of the Father in thought, action and word. Like Israel, we are called to separateness from the evil practices of our contemporaries. The apostle writes concerning the saint (chap 4:2):

"he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God, For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries."

Peter says, “keep separate,” be not governed by the moral standards of the times. His list of the favourite pastimes of the Gentiles is as true of our day, as it was of his. “Lasciviousness, lusts,” *i.e.*, the excitement of the lower passions. They are catered for in a thousand and one ways, notably by the defiling haunts of the world, the theatre, the music-hall, and the cinema, as witness the hoardings which advertise their amusements, and the periodical clean-ups to which these places are necessarily subject. No child of God can frequent them without contamination. Then there is the so-called popular press, which is not far behind in its

presentation of similar excitements. The camera-man, the court-reporter, the advertiser, each plays his part in the unsavoury business. A wise brother or sister, especially in a home where there are children, will confine newspaper reading to the better-class dailies — *The Times*, *The Telegraph*, or *The Morning Post*, which as yet (1937) have not yielded to the popular taste.

Then there are the dictates of fashion, and here the “running to excess of riot,” spoken of by the apostle Peter, is seen at its worst in what is styled sports-wear. No more than the barest elements of decorum are observed. Proximity to water seems to be the signal for casting off all decency and restraint. A few years ago, men and women would have been locked-up for appearing in public as they do to-day. Truly, we live in a decadent age, when moral values have sunk to the level of the Noachic Age. Then Peter speaks of “excess of wine, revellings, banquetings.” These things still have their attractions—public houses, road-houses, bathing-pools, and suchlike places, to which people go for sheer abandonment to pleasure. The Spirit's counsel is, “Touch not the unclean thing.” “Abstain from all appearance of evil.” How urgent, and ardent, is the apostle's appeal for carefulness in these matters—

“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”

We are called to purity, holiness, sanctification. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Our bounden duty is to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. The Divine Principles of rejection and acceptance at the Judgment-Seat have been clearly set forth. “He that *is* unjust, let him be unjust still; he which is filthy, let him be filthy still.” That means exclusion from the Kingdom, for “there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination.” But “he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still.” If we would be partakers of God's holiness in the age to come, we must aspire to godlikeness of character now, and such a condition will come only where there is close identification with whatsoever things are pure, lovely, and of good report.

The apostle deals with many other aspects of holiness in this first epistle. In chapter three, he deals with the duties of wives, and husbands. “Ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands.” He speaks of “chaste conversation” (manner of life),

“whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel, but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.”

The exhortation can be summed up in one word, Example, and is applicable to sisters married or unmarried. “Chaste manner of life” is the apostle's expression, with especial reference to the matter of dress.

From earliest times, the women of the world have been slaves to the dictates of vanity and fashion. We may rest assured that the fairness of the daughters of men which seduced the

antediluvians was something more than natural attractiveness. We recall also the haughtiness and vanity of the daughters of Israel, so scathingly denounced by God through the prophets. Sisters of Christ have something higher and nobler upon which to expend their energies, their time, and their money, than extravagant, external appearance, whether in the matter of dress or cosmetics. Gaudy, outward show is the world's cheap form of advertisement, where there is little else to commend the individual. It certainly does not commend itself to God, nor to those who are striving to be Godlike. Not that dowdiness or untidiness is any more commendable. Our God is a God of beauty and orderliness, as witness His works in creation — the flowers, birds, and precious stones, to name just a few. Everywhere there is beauty of form, colour, scent, taste, and tune; and human beings have been richly endowed with nature's gifts. We show our gratitude by the care we take to preserve these gifts. External appearance has its place, but it is secondary to higher, nobler, and more important matters. The servants of God will dress in a manner which betokens the character underneath — purity, meekness, quietness, sobriety, and soberness. Peter's phraseology speaks for itself, "The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit."

Peter next addresses a few words to husbands. He says (chap 3:7):

"Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life."

What practical advice, nay, divine command, is here enjoined. The husband is to exercise wisdom, common sense, intelligence, sound judgment, in relation to his wife. Let him endeavour to understand her point of view, and to inspire confidence and trust. He is to give honour to her as the weaker vessel. This implies love, attention, respect, sympathy and devotion. He is to regard her as a co-heir of the grace of life. This involves consideration for her spiritual needs, which he will endeavour to promote by conversation and reading and companionship in the Truth, and by enabling her to attend the meetings as often as possible.

Then, finally, the apostle addresses brethren in general:

"Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous."

That last item may appear trivial, but how conducive to the well-being of an ecclesia. Brethren, let us learn to be polite, well-behaved, respectful, especially towards the sisters, and brethren older in years or in the Truth than ourselves. Let not ignorance, or thoughtlessness, cause us to inadvertently break this divine command. Rather let unity, compassion, love, mutual affection, characterise all that we do, after the example of him whom we remember this morning — the most noble and perfect gentleman that the world has ever seen.

We cannot do better than conclude with the apostle's parting benediction (chap 5:10), "The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, make you perfect, "stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." H.T.A. (Taken from The Berean Christadelphian September 1937)