

THE TRUE LIFE OF CHRIST

We come together fatigued and perhaps discouraged by our six days' conflict with the present evil world: and we stand in need of the comfort and refreshing and rebuilding which our assembly round the table of the Lord is calculated to afford. We get it best from the word read and realised. We have this word in ever-varying forms; the same word in spirit and complexion, but in that variety of aspect and colour that enables us from first day to first day all the year round to feast at this table, on the same things, not only without weariness or sense of monotony, but with an absolutely increasing relish as the time goes on.

Our best plan is to take what is brought before us in the reading of the day. We are sure to get something wholesome and strengthening. We take today the sweet words of John, yet taking with them all the surroundings with which he gives them.

"Behold," he says, "what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God."

It is indeed a wonderful love. There is kindness with some men, and with different men, different forms of kindness. Some give alms: some help with sweet words: some will lend influence and helpful offices: but it is rare to find a man who will lift the object of his benevolence into his own circle and share with him his own privileges. Yet this is what God is doing and offering to do through the gospel. He invites us to be His sons—to become partakers of His own nature—to enjoy His fellowship of His Son. How unlike man! John might well ask us to behold it—to contemplate it—to consider it. The way with men is to keep people down, even though all have an equal right to occupy the best position: but God asks us up to a position to which we have no right.

"Behold, what manner of love" this is. Why do so few appreciate it, and gladly respond to it by accepting the invitation, and rejoicing in the love and in the goodness of it? There is a reason. There are many reasons, but there is one in particular which John indirectly supplies in his next sentence.

"Therefore," he adds, "the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."

As there is nothing for which men will work with more enterprise and diligence than to be known of the world—to be recognised—to be thought well of—to be deferred to, so there is nothing that on the common run of men inflicts more pain than to be ignored, and looked down upon. It is here where men are kept away from the truth. The loss of the world's honour is too high a price for them to pay. And nothing more effectually stops the world's honour than the espousal of the truth in its theoretical bearings and practical obligations. Paul and his fellow-apostles were counted *"the offscouring of all things."* Such sooner or later is the experience of every one who earnestly embraces and faithfully follows the truth which they planted 18 centuries ago. There may be men who know the truth who escape this experience; it must be because they shield themselves from it in ways that will not redound to their honour when Christ comes, such as where a man who keeps the truth in his pocket. There are professors of the truth whom you could not distinguish from the men of the world. In their ways, their practices, their principles of action, they are like those among whom they mingle: you could not discover anything in them of saintship in Christ Jesus. We are not to look to such for guidance. We are to look to the apostles as exhibited to us in their writings. They and they only illustrate to us the mind of the spirit—the policy and the model that will be acceptable to Christ in the day of his appearing.

In the abstract, it does appear a strange thing that sonship to God should be a reason why the world should disown a man. It is so in fact, and it is so by John's declaration. Perhaps we may discover the reason why it is so, if we reflect; and be thereby helped to take the right position in our day and generation. The habits of men will help us: the case of Christ will put the question beyond all uncertainty. Men love those who love the things they love and hate the things they hate. This is the universal bond of affinity. Now, men of the world love the world: men of God do not: they are forbidden to do so.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." (1 John 2:15.)

Because men of God do not love the world, men of the world can have no sympathy with them, and *"therefore the world knoweth us not."*

Men of the world hate godliness and the things of God. There are no terms too strong by which to express their contempt for them—"cant," "hypocrisy," "Pharisaism," "humbug," "slobber." Men of God love the things which excite the world's detestation. They obey Paul's command to Timothy:

"Flee these things (love of money, foolish and hurtful things greatly prized in the world, etc.), and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience."

What communion, therefore, can possibly exist between men who love and men who hate what the word of God enjoins? Men who love what the Word of God enjoins can only have the friendship of those who hate it by hiding their love, or doing violence to it, or worse still, letting it go. It is treading dangerous ground to trim and mince matters to please worldly friends. In fact, it is utterly impossible for a friend of God to have worldly friends. If a man's friendship to God is a reality, the friendship of the world for him will soon die, for the simple reasons already glanced at.

But let us come closer. The case of Christ settles all. If there were a case in which a son of God was likely to be recognised and loved by the world, it was surely in his—a man without fault, a man who went about doing good—a man whose words and works were of themselves sufficient to enchain the general wonder and admiration—who spake as never man spake, and used his wonderful power in deeds of blessing only. But how did his case work out? We know well. The symbols on the table tell us.

"He was despised and rejected of men."

The world did not love him. The world refused him. *"ME IT HATETH."* Such is his own testimony; and to his disciples he gave this comfort:

"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."

Why did the world hate Christ?

We discover the answer when we contemplate the leading mental attribute of Christ as exhibited in his own recorded words. What was that? Was it not this—the fervent and constant recognition of God's existence and prerogatives? What more intense expression could he give to this than when he said,

"My meat and my drink is to do the will of Him that sent me?"

And again,

"The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."

And again,

"I am come down from heaven to do the will of Him that sent me."

And again,

"I have manifested Thy Name to the men whom thou hast given me out of the world."

You cannot touch any part of Christ's life that has not God in it. As Paul said, *"For me to live is Christ,"* so Christ might have said, *"For me to live is God."* The first commandment of all, according to him, is, accordingly, to love God with all the heart. The God and Father of whom he thus spake is the God who spake to Moses and by all the prophets, —the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, —the Personal God revealed from the beginning as the Creator, inhabiting eternity, dwelling on high, located in glory in the heavens, yet filling immensity by His spirit.

This is a very different God from the God of modern philosophical and moral discourse. He is not an abstraction, but a Being: not an impassive tendency, impersonal and latent in the universe, but a conscious Intelligence: not a principle, but a person, a Majesty, a Father, the archetype of all personality.

The whole history of Israel has this personal God for its moving spring. The whole Mosaic Institution has this idea as its kernel—the *raison d'être* of its existence—the pivot of its operations. All its operations converge on this idea, —that God is a personal Being to be worshipped and obeyed: a Majesty and a Holiness so ineffable as to demand the utmost abasement, the deepest reverence in all approaches to Him. The God of Israel was the Father of the Lord Jesus; and with Christ, the Father was the one grand governing and overshadowing fact of the universe.

It is here where we understand the hatred shown to Christ by the world. Jesus defines its source in those words of his to the Father,

"The world hath not known thee, but I have known thee."

Here is the essence of the whole matter. The world knows not God; it is unbelieving of what He has revealed concerning himself; uninterested in the purpose he has formed and announced; and insubordinate towards the expression of His will. It is insubordinate to the point of rebellion. Nothing is so wilful as the human heart in unenlightenment. Paul expresses it strongly, but not too strongly, when he says,

"The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither, indeed, can be."

Now the universal human mind is unenlightened. Consequently, it is at the mercy of all the impulses that naturally belong to the human organization. These impulses make it rebellion against God, whom it knows not; and antagonistic to all who do know him. It sympathises with those only who are in harmony with its own likes and dislikes. This is why it applauds those leaders who flatter it, and minister to it the ideas and principles that are pleasing to its prejudices. Christ did not minister to those prejudices at all. He could not.

"I testify of it," he said, *"that the works thereof are evil."*

Therefore the world hated him.

Now, it is Christ himself who has said that what is true of him in this matter, is true also of his disciples.

"Ye are not of the world, as I am not of the world. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have

chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I have spoken to you, the servant is not greater than his lord."

This incompatibility between the world and the brethren of Christ is inevitable. It results from the nature of things. The characteristic of the brethren of Christ is the knowledge and love and service of God, as Jesus defines it:

"This is eternal life, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

"He that doeth the will of My Father, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

Such being the moral characteristics of the brethren of Christ, how is it possible that any friendship or sympathy can exist between them and a world, not only totally destitute of those affinities, but distinctly hostile to them? Talk to a Birmingham crowd of God, and our obligations to Him; talk even to the ordinary Birmingham person of such things, and do you not talk a tongue which is worse than unknown—a language resented as outlandish and inimical?

We have had a great stir in Birmingham this last week. You could in no better way judge of the difference between the spirit of the world and the spirit that is of God, than to conceive how the things of God would have sounded in the ears of the populace. Mr. Bright is very popular; because he speaks of the things that appeal to the instincts of the populace. He gives himself out as the friend of the people, and preaches the gospel of cheap bread, which the people understand and delight in. But suppose he were to take the ground that Christ took: suppose he were to tell the people as Jesus told them, that their works were evil (John 7:7); that God was the owner of all things and they ignored Him; that the credit of everything belonged to God and they took it to themselves; that God had spoken, and they took no notice; that He had announced a purpose and they had no interest in it; that He had delivered commandments, and they cast them behind their backs; that He had vouchsafed promises and that they insulted Him by neither caring for them nor believing them: how long would Mr. Bright's popularity last if he employed the great powers God had given him in telling the people these things which are true?

Such utterances would be execrated at every gathering of the people, and the utterer would be hounded out of society as an intolerable nuisance. Men, to be popular with the world, must be of the world, and speak in harmony with the world. The brethren of Christ are not of the world, and, therefore, the world hates them, as it hated Christ, and for the same reason. The brethren of Christ are lovers of God, and, therefore, cannot be friends of the world, who are not. They may do the world good, as they have opportunity, but it will be on their own ground as saints, which they would leave at the peril of their friendship with God.

This, then, is the reason why so few accept the glorious rank of sons of God. It brings with it the world's rejection, which is hard to bear. No sane man can find pleasure in the world's scorn, except in the sense in which it is testified of the apostles, that they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ. It is crucifying to the natural man to be looked upon as rubbish and rot. But there is another side. There is a future coming along.

"It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that WHEN HE SHALL APPEAR, we shall be like him."

What a wonderful reversal of affairs this will be, when the poor, and the despised, but faithful friends of Christ and lovers of God are emancipated from the weakness of this corruptible

nature, and made glorious, and noble, and immortal, like the Son of God at his return, and exalted to places of honour and power, when the sinners, however mighty, will be put down from their seats everywhere throughout the world. There is not a man of these arrogant, foul-mouthed men of the present order, but what will want to cringe at the feet of the smallest of Christ's friends in the day of recompense. They will all be eager to serve Christ then: but it will be too late. It is not eye-service that Christ appreciates: it is not service for the sake of advantage that he will accept, but a service rendered for love's sake, through the power of enlightenment received and cherished in the day of darkness that prevails in his absence.

This is the service we are united in trying to render. The acceptance of it will be the highest reward it is possible for the imagination to conceive. The hope of it is the most ennobling and purifying power possible to be at work among men. As John here says,

"He that hath this hope purifieth himself."

This is its intended effect as regards the day of our probation. Christ aims to—

"Redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."

Let us, dear brethren and sisters, yield ourselves to this aim, reciprocally to the will of Christ. Let us keep ourselves unspotted from the world. Having put our hand to the plough, let us not look back. Let us arm ourselves against all weariness and faintness of mind, and keeping our eye on him who fought the battle before us, who endured a greater contradiction of sinners than will ever fall to our lot, let us run with patience the race set before us, remembering it is a short race at the longest; and that it is a race which victoriously run, will end in shouts of welcome from myriads of the glorified sons of God.

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