

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 16

Ephesians 5. —The most important thing for us to know after we have come to a knowledge of the truth, and taken up that attitude which the truth requires of everyone who believes it, is, how we ought to walk in the new position to which we have been introduced. This information is abundantly spread before us in the letters which, in the providence of God, Paul wrote to the various ecclesias existing in his time, and which, in the providence of God, have been preserved down to this late age. The chapter that has been read is one very important contribution. It begins by a very comprehensive exhortation:

“Be, therefore, followers of God as dear children.”

This is in substance the exhortation which Jesus himself uttered while in the flesh. He said—

“Be ye holy, as your Father in heaven is holy; be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

To follow God is to be like Him. We know what God is, because He has revealed Himself. Those by whom He spoke inform us, in varied forms of speech, of what some call the attributes or mental qualities that belong to God; therefore, we have only to look these in the face to see—faintly, it may be, but nevertheless, to see—what sort of people we ought to be; nay, what sort of people we must be if the truth is to be of any benefit to us. We are told, for instance, that God is love, and, accordingly, you find, in the very next verse of the exhortation under our notice, we are told to “*walk in love.*” The persons that do not walk in love are not of God, however clearly they may understand the truth, and however zealous and contentious they may be for it. If their mental operations, and, therefore, their acts and words, are not centred in love, they have not yet known the truth as they ought to know it. They are mere clouds without water, giving promise of rain, but mocking the thirsty ground beneath.

Love was from eternity; love gave birth to creation. Love exiled Adam and Eve from Eden, that woe might not be everlasting. Love laid the foundations of the truth. Love gave us the child of Bethlehem, by the power of the Highest; love made him a sufferer, and gave him into the hands of men, to be cruelly mocked and spat upon. Love brought him out of the grave. Love exalted him to the priestly office in the heavens; eternal love will send him to earth again, and, by his hand, will drive all rulers from their thrones, wreck all their governments, and give the way of God to the sorrowing nations. Love will bring all to the bosom of God, remove sin, banish death, and fill the earth with glory and love eternal. Love is the beginning—love is the end.

What then is the position of the man who, having the truth, is destitute of the principle in which it had its origin, and in which it will have its end? What sort of relation has he to that perfect assembly of the future which will live—physically and mentally—in the very atmosphere of love? He is a bastard and not a son; an ugly abortion in the family of God; a swine whose prying snout has unearthed the jewels of the sanctuary, and profaned them by unholy appropriation. We can well understand why John should say that a man who loves not is not of God. The man who says he loves God and loves not his neighbour, is a liar; for real love shows itself in good deeds towards the unthankful and the evil, as well as towards the good. Therefore, let us have this fact emblazoned, as it were, in visible letters, continually before our eyes, that the first lesson of our high calling is that we ought to walk in love.

At the same time, let us read that lesson with discrimination; let us not put up that motto and tear down other mottoes that ought to be kept up as well. 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, it may be without intending it. He would have us obey one part of it and not another. We must avoid

such a man, and go from his counsel, as we would from the music of the seductive serpent. There is death in his words, though they are kindly words, and well meant. We must hold love as God does. Does the love of God prevent him from being angry? Does the love of God prevent him from being jealous? Does the love of God prevent him from cleaving the earth sometimes, and letting a Korah, Dathan, and Abiram into the abyss? Does the love of God prevent him from drowning millions of people, and burning thousands of others in the fires of Sodom? No, no. The love of God never interferes with anything else; nor will it in his children.

Our duty to love must never interfere with our duty to declare the truth, and that truth is, that all men are mortal, and have no prospect whatever of gaining the favour of God, except in the way He has appointed—the belief and obedience of the gospel. What an irrational proposition, that because we are to walk in love, we are to hold our tongues on these things! —that because we are to obey the exhortation to walk in love, we are to disobey the exhortation to—

“Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints!”

This is the way men around us wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction. Foolish, brainless orthodoxy puts on a smiling oily face, and pretends to be very “charitable.” It would not say a disagreeable word to anybody. It thinks it highly uncharitable to say to people that they are wrong.

What is true charity? —real kindness; and is it kind or unkind if you see a person going the wrong road, to tell him that is not the way? The pious people of orthodoxy exclude this kindness by laying down a false rule of charity. They say “Keep your opinions to yourself; other people have as much right to their opinions as you have.” It is true that as between man and man, everyone has a right to his own opinion; but is this a reason why a man should keep his convictions to himself? If his convictions are of any moment—that is, if they relate to anything affecting the interests of those around him, it is the very reason why he should speak, because every man having a right to his own opinion, there is hope, that by ventilation, others may be brought to embrace “opinions” that are true.

If the Christadelphians proposed to take a man’s opinions from him by force—as the Pope used to do—there might be some force in the complaint; but it is an exceedingly absurd complaint to urge against the bare proposition of the truth. If a man has a right to his convictions, he has also a right to declare them. Others may exercise their right of refusing to hear, but they ought not to impugn liberty of speech. If a man know the way of life and is in earnest; it is impossible he can hold his tongue; for both duty and impulse will drive him to speak. The man who can hold his tongue out of deference to other people’s feelings, gives evidence that he is not in earnest, but that, as a mere formalist, he has a creed as worldly people have their creeds, and, like them, is not going to allow his “creed” to interfere with his business or spoil his neighbourliness. The sons and daughters of God are not of this type. The things of this life are, with them, entirely secondary. The first thing is the truth; the will of God in all things. They “*seek **first** the kingdom of God and His righteousness,*” and, seeking it first for themselves, they are not likely to make it secondary in their relations with others.

There is, therefore, a broad distinction between those who are of God, and those who are of the world. The distinction is to be seen even among those who profess the truth of whom the truth has not taken possession, and with whom the truth is not a power. Let us take heed that we belong not to this class. If we are to be like Christ, we must resemble him; and he declared of himself that his meat and his drink was to do the will of Him who sent him. Is this not our part likewise? This, indeed, is our mission. Before we knew the truth, we had no mission; we belonged to the dogs outside. We were of that outcast race who are no more inhabitants of the earth, in the real sense, than the beasts of the field—who happen to be here just now, but are not fixtures, and will be gone shortly. We were amongst them once, without

hope—without God—without a mission; but when the truth comes, it puts a mission in our hands, and the mission ought to be our meat and drink.

With those who are of God, it will be so; with others, not. In the very days of Christ, a great many followed him, but only a very few of them were his true disciples; and, on one occasion, when he brought the truth very hard to bear, the majority said—

“This is a hard saying, who can hear it? And they walked no more with him.”

Another time, the crowds were following him, as much as to say “We will honour this man; we will give him our support, which is a great thing for him.” Jesus turned round and said—

“If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, his brothers and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”

That was cold water to the zeal of the crowd, for they were following him exactly with reference to father and mother, and houses and land. They thought it would be a good thing for themselves and their friends to espouse the cause of a man who would shortly be on the throne. They followed him with fleshly objects, and, therefore, Jesus chid them.

If that were the case among the personal followers of Christ; if when he himself was here, who spake as never man spake, large numbers crowded round him who were afterwards blown away as chaff, need we wonder if in the day in which we live, when there is no voice of authority, when the voice of God does not speak to us, except in the silent words of His book, many should be drawn by this and that to make a profession of the truth, whose meat and drink it is (while they like the truth), to make themselves comfortable—who think it a pleasant thing to be among friendly people; a nice thing to go to meetings; delightful to get rid of the horrid doctrines, and grim, long-faced bondage of orthodoxy, and to get among people where there is intelligence, love, and freedom; but whose hearts walk after the world for all that.

There are many things to draw people to the truth in the present day; and what I wish to say is, that no one should feel discouraged if they fail to see in all who profess the truth, that allegiance to it—that burning love of it—that thoroughgoing consecration to it, which in their own hearts they may be yearning after. All Christ’s people will hear his voice. God’s work will be done; God’s people will be brought out; God’s people will be of the right sort; therefore let us give ourselves no anxiety of a grievous sort. Our anxiety should be this, to take care lest we fail in doing our duty. In doing our duty, let us not be anxious, for the kingdom will come, and there will be those to enter it, who in the present state, have shown the characteristics of the true sheep, in hearing the voice of the shepherd with attentive and loving ear, and following him.

Such will now answer to the description here given. They walk in love, but they will not be all milk and honey. Christ was not so. He was a very disagreeable man to those who were not on the same side as himself. He was always railing against the clergy of his day—the Scribes and Pharisees, whom he denounced as those who had taken away the key of knowledge from the people. He sometimes looked upon them with anger, when they tried to entrap him in his words. He was a man whom they hated. Jesus described the source of this hatred in words addressed to his brethren according to the flesh, at a time when they were unbelievers. He said—

“The world cannot hate you, but me it hateth, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil.”

This is precisely the basis of the world’s hatred towards the people of Christ. If the latter would admit that the world was right, they might hold anything they liked, so far as the world was concerned. The world would like them. The cry of charity is really a plea for smoothing things over. People don’t want it to be said they are wrong, whatever may be thought, and because we say it, we are hated. If we run in the groove of silence, and seem to countenance the world’s fables and frivolities—rather display a weakness to be like the

world, we should be thought well of. If this is true with regard to words, much more is it true with regard to acts. The world is made uncomfortable by the implied protest of non-conformity. If we would only do as they do, they would forgive our doctrines. There are many inducements to give in to them. It wants courage to act the part of the high calling. We are in danger of playing the coward, and bowing as it were in the world's great presence.

As an example, look at dress in which the world is at present running riot. This extravagance of personal adornment is a folly in the sinner, and a snare to the righteous. Who are the world's greatest fools? Those who dress the highest. The empty snob is known by his superb and ostentatious appurtenances. You find him got up in the latest style of Vanity Fair, with all noisiness of colour, flash and fumigation; loud voice and impudent swagger, disporting himself in the widest ways of the city. His sister, if possible, more empty-headed than he, is also in the foremost ranks of fashion. What is fashion? It is the mere ingenuity of the world to vary its pleasures; and to deliver itself from what—to its foolish heart—would be the dull monotony of existence. Its enjoyments are of a kind that soon grow stale. It requires “change;” and in the matter of dress, it issues fresh decrees with every moon; and with what alacrity its decrees are obeyed. At once the millions bow the knee! The people—vanity are they! —recognise fashion as their king. As soon as he comes forth, they go and dance like fools round his throne. The greatest fools are nearest the throne. The little wisdom there is in the throne, is found in the outer circle. You can always tell when there is not much in the head: there is plenty of show outside. Everything is as neat, and precise, and superfine as if the man had just emerged from a bandbox. There is no necessity for being tawdry or Quakerish; nevertheless, there is a very broad margin between the high dresser and the slut. You may be well up to fashion, or you may be afar off, and you will take your place according to your moral status. This margin, and the working of this rule, you will see in the world. Whom do you find in the inner court of fashion? The empty heads, the triflers, the people who are not governed by principle; those who have no sense of the gravity of existence; to whom God is nothing, Christ a myth, and the future a blank.

Come out of the inner court, and go to the outer circle of dress, where people attire themselves for convenience and decency, and as you go, you find people becoming more and more sensible, sober, and unobtrusive, until, by and by, you come upon men of judgment and capacity, and mind. If this is the case with regard to the world, how little excuse there is for those who profess the name of Christ indulging in the vice of “*costly array*.” Let them obey the apostle and “*adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety*.”—(1 Tim. 2:9.) There is no necessity for being odd, but there is need for eschewing the excesses into which the world is running in the matter, and this can be done without any offence to a pure taste. There is nothing more beautiful than to see men and women of judgment attired in a plain unobtrusive manner. High dressing takes a considerable percentage off the moral dignity of such. It implies a lingering affinity with the low class of intelligence that thinks to create appreciation by the display of stuff that can be purchased over a counter.

Men and women, who walk in the knowledge and love of God, can dispense with such meretricious attractions, even if in the doing of it, they have to dispense with the favourable opinions of foolish neighbours. The point I was driving at was this: that those who walk in love are not necessarily liked. The wrong sort of people did not love Christ. Those who loved the truth loved him, but he was hated of the others, though he walked in love; and so were the prophets, and all the righteous men whose approval is recorded in the Scriptures. We are, therefore, in good company if we are disliked because of our faith and testimony.

Yet let us beware of making it a cloak of evil. To be valiant for the truth is good, but to delight in ravening upon the easy prey of orthodoxy—to glory in mere doctrinarian pugilism—to find gleeful sport in tearing, with bark and bite, the rotten rags of a superstitious faith, is abomination of the most odious kind. It is a pitiable sight to see the truth in such

unholy hands. It is a jewel of gold in a swine's snout. Such is the unfortunate alliance where the truth is held without those moral effects which it is the very design of it to produce. In all things, let love be the centre of operation—the guiding motive. Be kindly affectionate one toward another, and toward all men. Let the love of God fill the hearts and minds of everyone who has obeyed from the heart the form of doctrine delivered by the apostles.

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