

HOLINESS

IT is well, brethren and sisters, that we should live under the constant recollection of the fact which we have just been setting forth in song—the omnipresence of God. If we did, we should succeed to a greater extent than we do in the great objects of our calling. It is true that those objects are not to be finally realized until the Lord comes, and calls from the dead those of his friends who are sleeping in the dust, and to his wedding-feast such amongst the living as are worthy of being associated with him. But there are objects connected with our calling that must be realized even now, before we can be permitted to participate in the far greater associations to be developed at the Lord's return. We are called at present to sustain a certain attitude, and that attitude has many sides to it. We are called to the attitude of witnesses for the truth; but that is insufficient of itself to give us a participation in the kingdom of God. No man who merely believes the truth and speaks of it to his neighbour, will be saved; for we find mention of some to be rejected in that day who will say, "*Have we not preached in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works?*" If our fitness rises no higher than an apprehension and agitation of the theory of the truth we are not fit for the kingdom of God. The truth is intended to hew us, intellectually and morally, into a certain shape: that shape is the shape of Christ. We have him for an example, and if we do not follow his example, we shall not stand with him in the day of his glory. We are called to holiness. Now that word is a very expressive and comprehensive one: holiness is a state of cleanness, and cleanness in its moral relations consists of freedom from all that is constituted morally polluting by the law of God. That is right which God commands—that is wrong which He forbids. That is holy which He calls clean, and that is unholy which He disallows. There is no other rule of righteousness than that. The moral philosophy of the world is a very artificial affair. In most cases, it is an attempt to justify the commandments of God on natural principles. Certain maxims have been brought to the notice of the world in the teaching of Christ, and men of carnal minds, utterly unsubject to the law of God, have taken hold of the mere aesthetic beauties of these things, and constructed out of them a philosophy of their own—a standard of their own; but in point of fact they have no standard; there is no standard of right except the will of God. When men begin to talk of "the eternal fitness of things," they get into an intellectual morass. There is no standard of righteousness, but obedience to God's commandments.

God's commandments are unmistakable; they are so very simple that we are liable to forget them, and if we forget them, we cannot be saved. We must keep them in remembrance, and act upon them, especially the last. It is the doing of them that is acceptable. It is not sufficient to acknowledge them. "*Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*" Now Christ says we are to be kind to each other, and if we are not so, however much we may know the truth, we do not belong to him; the knowledge of the truth will then be to our condemnation.

"*If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*" Now besides kindness, the spirit of Christ was a spirit of worship. He often retired to pray; and he told the woman of Samaria that the Father sought a certain class (in spirit and in truth) to worship Him. What is the worship of God, brethren and sisters? It is the deferential and reverential concentration of the mind upon Him, intelligently, consciously, lovingly, adoringly, trustingly, and prayerfully, with a deep sense of the things disclosed concerning Him and us in the truth. It is an attitude of mind requiring the highest abstraction. Merely to sing is not to worship, nor is it to deliver a well-worded address to the Deity. There is such a thing as drawing near with the lips while the heart is far away. This was the worship that God abhorred in Israel, and it will

be no more acceptable at our hands in the name of Jesus. We require to abstract our minds from surroundings and fix them on the mighty Universal Presence in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways.

This mental attitude, whether in an individual or in an assembly, will produce indifference to immediate surroundings. It cannot co-exist with attention to these surroundings. If, therefore, in singing, you see some look about to see what neighbours are doing; or speak and whisper with his neighbours, or attending to any second matter whatever, you are yourself interfered with in the luxury of worship, and perceive evidence of a want of worship in the disturber. This is an evil. The worship of God requires all our attention—a complete fixing of our mind upon Him, knowing that His ear is open and that His eye is upon us. As David expresses it: "*Thou hast beset me behind and before. Thou understandest my thought afar off ... The darkness and the light are both alike to thee.*" Now, our meetings are designed for the collective exercise of this thought, and the possessors of holiness will be full of responsive sympathy to this supreme object of our association. We ought all to be so conditioned mentally that when we stand up to sing, we sing to God and do not go through a performance merely. A performance is abhorrent to God and all holy men. It is one of the abominations of our time that mere performances take place as a professed act of collective worship. It would be better to have bad music with a general concentration of the mind on God and His truth, than the finest strains with an absence of that concentration.

Now we must pay attention to those things, for the present is all important to us. It will be too late to mend our ways when Christ comes; and Christ's coming is not very far from every one of us. This statement is one that has been true ever since the time of the apostles, and it finds illustration in the chapter that has just been read. "*Absent from the body*" practically means to be present with the Lord. There is no conscious break to the person who undergoes the absence. It is an instantaneous change of condition. I have been thinking much upon that point this last week. I have thought a chart might be drawn, which would very vividly bring that before the mind's eye—that as we are unconscious of death, there is no such thing in relation to us, individually, as death, because we shall be unaware of death happening; it will be all gone by before we know it has happened. Now, because that is the case, we have to look at the thing in this practical way—that Christ is standing at the end of our little career, as it were; that as we reach the end of that career, we shall seem to stand in his presence. In that sense, he is not far off. He is waiting at the end of our journey to receive us. Although, actually, the reception does not take place until he comes; and although, actually, none of us will be glorified until all are, yet, in relation to each individual consciousness, it will appear to be instantaneously occurrent when we close our eyes in death, because, as unconscious of death as of sleep, and more so, we shall appear at once to stand face to face with the Lord. Consequently, if we are to die a week hence, practically the coming of the Lord is only a week away from us.

It seems to me there is great comfort in that thought. In fact, it just gives the consolation which orthodox believers take, and which they think we lack; but which we do not lack at all. To contemplate the gap of time that may actually divide any generation from the coming of Jesus, may give us the idea of its being a very long period; but it may be answered, that when we are dead, we shall know nothing about that gap at all, and, therefore, the Lord is near, in that sense, to every one of us. In our century, we know that in another sense he is very near. We are just in the position that Christ indicated to his disciples, when he said they were to watch lest they might be taken unawares; and we are watching for his speedy appearing, for although we know not the day nor the hour, we have been given to

know the dispensation by the light which God has vouchsafed by Daniel and John. Beyond the general knowledge of the time of the end, we know not the hour of his appearance. We do not know in what part of the latter-day programme it is intended he shall reveal himself to his servants. It is well to see that whatever may occur in this respect, to us as individuals, he is at the door. This is a thought which has great power in giving the truth a reality it may fail to have if we are all the time poisoning ourselves in relation to great periods. It enables us to surrender ourselves more entirely to our espousals. We are called to be espoused to Christ. Paul said to the Corinthians that he had espoused them as a chaste virgin to Christ; they were betrothed, and that is our position; that is to say, we are entirely his. We do not possess the liberty the world claims, and which some mistaken servants claim. Our position is that which Paul defines—*"Henceforth know we no man after the flesh."*

When a man puts on the Lord Jesus in obedience to the truth, he assumes a new position, and his relations to things around him are altogether different to what they are in Nature. He sees things in quite a different light; he is not of the flesh, and recognizes no scheme as having a claim upon his sympathy that merely has to do with the present evil world. His hope is to be delivered from this present evil world. Christ has given himself that this deliverance may be accomplished. Our position, meanwhile, is that of denying ourselves ungodliness and worldly lusts, and looking for the blessed hope of his coming again. We are not our own. As Paul says (2 Cor. 5:14), *"The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again."* The argument of that is very simple. Paul says that if one died for all, representatively, then all died in him so that we should reckon ourselves dead and buried, so far as this life's relationships go. We are not, as Peter says, to live the rest of our time in the flesh, to fulfil the lusts of the flesh, but to do the will of him who lived and died for us. That seems exceedingly reasonable, and we shall certainly find out on that day, when the Lord stands upon the earth again, and masses before him all his people, that none will, be selected for companionship in his glory but those who have answered to this description—who have lived for him, who have been faithful stewards of their trust. None doubt this theoretically. The great matter is to get believers to recognize the fact practically. I presume that these first-day meetings were instituted by Christ for the very purpose of enabling us to realize these great things. If we did realize them, we should be more practical and earnest in our position as the Lord's servants.

Just imagine the Lord Jesus in the earth again, and ourselves summoned to meet him. What would be the great anxiety on the part of every one of us? Only one. All the anxieties of a lifetime would take flight, except one: "What does he think of us?" That will be the engrossing concern of the moment. Now, what is it that determines Christ's opinion of us? Is it the state of mind that will be produced by the occurrence of his advent? No; for then everybody will be in a state of readiest loyalty; everybody will then see that Christ is really the only important calculation of life; and, of course, they will be prepared with all manner of protestations and professions, with tears, how much they desire him. These will not move Christ. That which determines his opinion is what we are doing now. He has made known the principle of his judgment: *"I will give to every one of you according as your work shall be."* Therefore, now is the time of action. Let every man look to what he is doing—and every woman. Let them remember that their present daily life—dull, uninteresting, unimportant though it may appear, is really pregnant with their destiny. All depends upon how they turn the present time to account. Future position will be determined entirely by present deportment; the important thing is to be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. And how can we be in this state if we neglect the means whereby

we may attain to it—the reading of the Word, and the assembling of ourselves together? We ought not to trust to second-hand information in this important matter. Speeches we may listen to and articles we may read are liable to be greatly diluted and corrupted by human thought. We are apt to be misled by this one's opinion and that one's opinion as to what we should do. When we consider that in that day, with which any individual may be face to face immediately, human opinions and human professions will disappear like mist in the divine presence, we can see how true it is that the only wisdom, at present, in the midst of all our toils and labour is to adhere to the Word of God, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. What will Christ care as to a man's "position" in the estimation of fellow-men? He has told us that that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. He looks not at a man's "position." We must remember that Christ is the embodiment of the great Power that said by Isaiah, *"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways."* We shall be judged by the simple standard, "Have you done what I commanded you?" That will be the one simple question; indeed, it is the very simplicity of it that seems to turn people away from it. "Have you done what I commanded?" We all know what we are doing, and we shall be able to give a right account, either for good or evil. Well, whatever we may say about ourselves, he will make manifest what we are, and our anxiety should be, while the Lord delays, to get on the right side of the account.

All his commandments have to do with practical daily life. Hence, next to a knowledge of the truth, the practical management of daily life is the main question. There is a reason for laying continual stress on this: having had to struggle out of darkness, we have had our minds drawn very much into polemical channels. We have been much occupied in getting to know what truth is, consequently we are liable to stop short at our attainment of this, whereas we have done but a small thing. We are, as it were, in no more forward a position than the crowds that listened to Christ. They heard what he had to say; they knew what the truth was, but that merely opened the door for their salvation. Obedience was the difficulty. The knowledge of the truth only opens the door. We cannot be saved before that. There is no hope for us at all apart from the Gospel; but the Gospel only gives us the start. It all depends how we walk after that. What ought the assembly of Christ to be but a representation, on a small scale, of what is to be made politically dominant when Christ comes, and when God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven? We are called unto that kingdom, and, therefore, as an assembly of those who are called unto the kingdom, we ought to exemplify those characteristics that will appertain to it in the day of its manifestation. All the purity of individual thought and action which will prevail then in the world; all rejoicing in the truth, and making our boast in God that will then be the universal law; all that loving of men and serving of God that will prevail, ought to be incipiently visible in our assembly. We ought to be the kingdom of God in miniature; in fact, all the saints are: there is no doubt about that, though there may be a doubt as to who are the saints. Therefore, let us walk in the light of the word. Do not heed what is said on the right hand or on the left. Avail yourself of good company, if you can get it, but take care you do not get injured where you expected to be benefited. Remember that most of those by whom you are surrounded have but recently emerged from the world with all its ignorance, disobedience, stupidity, and carnality, and that you are not to be despondent and lose heart because other people may not exemplify the truth. If others do not, you try, at least; save yourself from this untoward generation. It is just as untoward as the generation of Peter, and it is only by the means offered by Peter, in the name of Christ, that we have any hope at all.

(Taken from "Seasons of Comfort" Volume 1, Pages 137-142 by Bro. R. Roberts.)

