

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 6

John, Second Epistle. This letter (short and sweet), though apparently addressed to an individual, is without doubt, written to an ecclesia. John by this time was an old man. He was nearly 100 years of age when this was written; and we know that when a man gets up into life, his mind develops with advancing years. He loses the plain, cold, literal style of speech that belongs to the first stage of mental action, and becomes mellow and metaphorical. This is a universal rule, and you find it illustrated here. John styles his brethren and sisters, his children: he says he had no greater joy than to see his *children* walk in the truth. Now, his children were not boys and girls as the term, literally construed, would express; but men and women whom he had brought into Christ by the preaching of the truth. The same style of expression is observed in the beginning of this letter: he addresses himself *“to the elect lady whom I love in the truth;”* not a literal lady, but the ecclesia to whom he was writing. You will find that he sends, in the last verse, the love of the ecclesia with which he was connected, in a similar form.

“The children of thine elect sister greet thee.”

The children were the members of the ecclesia with whom he worshipped.

The next feature to be noticed is the fact stated in the commencement of this epistle, that his love to them had its basis in the truth.

“Whom I love in the truth.”

Now we can all to some extent understand what John means by that; because we have all, in a greater or less degree, experienced in some shape, and are prepared by contrast to understand, love in the truth. There are various kinds of love. There is even among thieves a kind of brotherly love; they are attached to each other as members of the same gang, having a common interest. Among the lowest and most degraded, you will find some form of attachment. Wherever men’s interests are identical, there is always a certain interest in each other, which does not exist towards those who are strangers to their pursuits. There is, on the other hand, a mere neighbourly love, which springs up with mere contact—a mild sort of interest that does not go below the surface, and belongs to the day and the hour. Between the sexes, there is another and more special form of love.

All these loves have their origin in the flesh; that is, they result from the action of the mere instincts with which we are endowed in common with the brute creation—instincts which form a valuable element in the mental composition where the higher faculties rule, but which are neither capable nor designed in themselves to afford a basis of lasting happiness. The love that exists in the world is based upon one or other of these shallow feelings, and is, consequently, of an ephemeral and uncertain character. It burns dimly and selfishly while it lasts, and quickly vanishes before a change of circumstances. The love that springs from companionship in pleasure flies before adversity. The love that comes from identity of business or social interests is destroyed by a single breath of misfortune. Nothing is more notorious than that the world goes cold and turns its face away when the sun of prosperity ceases to shine. Even the love of the sexes dies with age, and cannot flourish against ill-favoured conditions.

Now, love in the truth is a very different affair from all these; it is quite a higher thing in every respect—higher in the conditions it requires for its activity—higher in the nature of its action. It is at once a more delicate and more enduring thing, more refined, and more tough. It lays hold of, and has relation to, a much higher aspect of being. It deals with higher things. It mounts to God, stretches to futurity, and strikes root deeply into the very foundations of being while the love of the world ignores God, fixes on the present only, and has relation to the mere surface of things. Speaking phrenologically, love in the truth engages and requires the front and top brain, while the world’s loves have to do with the side and the back. That may appear a vulgar way of putting it, but you will find it is literally true.

But, of course, nothing can be done without the truth. Love in the truth must start with the truth; it cannot make a beginning without it. You will find, as a matter of religious experience, that our love is bounded by the truth. It cannot be bestowed in a very warm form where the truth is unknown, and still less where it is opposed and rejected. Where the truth is received there is a starting point; but even after that, the degree of its intensity is determined by conditions. Personal love will exist in the ratio of the love existing for the truth itself. You have only to pass in review the different classes of people professing the truth to see the truth of this.

Take first the individual who simply gives in his adhesion to the truth in its doctrinal form: he has come to the conclusion that the popular doctrines are fables, and the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ are the truth; but it is with him simply a matter of intellectual recognition. It is only theory with him. His practical estimate of things has not been altered by his new convictions. The things involved in the truth have not engaged his love. His interest still runs in a worldly channel. He is taken up with the things that belong to the present. His affections are set on things on the earth, and not on things above. Conversation on the truth is impossible with him. His replies on religious matters are monosyllabic. He assents to a remark made, but he never supplies fresh material; his mind is not running on the matter. Only turn, however, upon another subject, begin to ask him about his business, and instantly he will become voluble, his tongue will be loosed; he will be able, with multiplicity of words and emphasis of expression, almost rhetorical, to describe the various matters pertaining to his particular occupation. Or, suppose he is a domestic man, he will be able to give almost an inventory of the furniture and effects, and a treatise on the best articles of diet and the way to cook them, the terms upon which the house is leased, and all the minutiae of details going to make up the mere substratum of existence.

Another man, still of the same type, who has simply received the theory of the truth, and is, nominally, one of the truth's friends, but of whose heart it has not taken possession—in whom Christ does not dwell by faith—takes a particular interest in politics or town gossip. He will be able to talk over the last move in the cabinet, or the merits of some local candidate for electoral honours. Or, it may be, he is a devotee of science, too wise to appreciate the truth, or the enthusiast of some social movement, to whom the truth is too sober and abstruse. In either case, the result is the same. The truth has no charm for him. He is not taken up with Christ. The things that are of God he hurries out with monosyllables.

Now, what I mean to say is this, that if you yourself are thoroughly engrossed with the truth—if you are one of those strangers and pilgrims who feel, mournfully, that you have here no continuing city, but look for one to come—your love is feebly excited by such an individual. His acceptance of the truth imposes upon you the obligation to recognize him, to help him, to countenance him, to cooperate with him; but you feel you have to put forth an exertion to do it, as a duty to Christ. He does not draw the love out of you, because he lacks the spiritual magnetism which the heart generates in a heart that fully takes it in. Temperance movements, scientific hobbies, and political agitations are of no value to the man who has the truth. They are beneath his notice, as a matter of life service. They are gods of the world, at whose shrine worship is worse than wasted. They will be nowhere when our life is run out, and the times of the Gentiles are past; and yet so imperfectly educated is this class of man we are considering, that he prefers the bubbles of the passing generation to the solid riches of Christ. What a pity for all concerned.

How different to cultivate love in the truth with those who know the truth, and are enamoured of it heartily and thoroughly; whose minds are steeped in it because they steep them; for, be it always borne in mind, that this is not a thing that comes by accident or depends upon temperament. A man's natural capacity may have something to do with the success of his studies, but there is no man that will come at the love of the truth by accident. It is quite a matter of business in one sense—a plain case of cause and effect. Here is the truth; here is the brain. If the one is put into the other, there will be a result: the mind will reflect the divine things contained in the Bible; but I know that if I don't read this, I shall not come under the power of it; I shall have no idea of it, and think nothing of it. If I apply my brain to mathematics, or devote my faculties to business, there will be a similar expenditure of brainpower, but with a very different result—a better result in a temporal point of view it may be, but a very different result as regards tone of mind. The views, motives, tastes, and hopes become very

different under the two processes. The man having his eyes opened to what the Bible reveals, may be very aptly compared to the man in the parable who discovers there is a pearl hid in a certain field, but he knows he cannot get it without digging. Spiritual-mindedness is in the Bible, but we cannot acquire it except by constant intercourse with the Bible.

We can only hope to get our minds under the influence of the truth by steeping our minds in it, and this is only to be done by laying it down for ourselves as a rule to read it continually, day by day. If we do that, then we shall get at the result; the mind will become steeped because we steep it. When you get hold of a man who thus steeps his mind in divine things, what a luxury beyond expression! You then experience what it is to love in the truth. There is no love so genial, none so rich, so pure and lasting as that which springs from a unity of interest in spiritual things. The real joys of existence are all connected with the truth; outside the truth, there is nothing but doubt, anxiety, fear, distress, sin, and death. They, therefore, make a great mistake who let the truth slip from any cause, or who give the truth the second place in the economy of their life. There are no circumstances that will justify such a mistake. God will not accept any justification of it.

Jesus demands to be put first; and when we realise who he is, and what it is he calls us to, we can see the reasonableness of his demand. He is only exacting of us that which will be for our supreme benefit, though it may not appear so now. Joy unspeakable and full of glory is latent in all his commandments. In due season we shall reap the rich harvest of obedience, if we faint not. The man who gives Christ the second place will realise his position when this puny life is gone; and it will go, however filled up and impressed with its concerns we may be at the present moment. The time will come, as sure as the sun tracks his daily course in the heavens, when we shall have to say good-bye to the things of the present life; and when they are cut away, they will be gone for ever; and the man who lives for them, and is part and parcel of them, will vanish with them. Nothing but the truth will remain.

“The world passeth away, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

The man who has lived for Christ, has something laid up in store which nothing can touch and no time decay, an inheritance undefiled and that fadeth not away.

In these matters, we must mistrust the sentiments that are current around us. The mind of Christendom, in practical as well as doctrinal matters, is not the mind of Christ in scarcely one particular. Our only safety lies in the close companionship of the Bible. In this we have the whole of God’s written word, bound up in a compendious form, which we can consult at home like one of the ancient oracles. This is so true and yet so difficult to realise, that it becomes necessary to insist continually upon it, line upon line, precept upon precept, as it was in the days of old. People agree with it as a matter of sentiment, and yet when they get into the current of active life, they are traitorous to their convictions—they allow the temporary interests of this passing mortal state to divert them from what theoretically they admit to be the highest duty of life. They have a Bible, but they cannot find time to read it; they say it is the word of God, but they are not interested in it; they go on from Sunday to Sunday, thinking that in the end it will be all right, whilst they are thoroughly absorbed in the secular affairs of life.

At last they come to their death-bed, where we shall all certainly have to review our past career, if Christ does not come before that event; then they suddenly open their eyes to their folly, and speak words of warning to the living. But the living take no heed. They are full of life’s concerns. They may be momentarily impressed, but they have a strong mental background relating to this life. They go, it may be, into the chamber of the individual who has wasted his life, and they hear him say, “Do not as I have done; be wiser than I have been.” They heave a solemn sigh, but it is a surface sigh: it only emanates from the side next to the dying man. Behind them is the picture of the great world without, and the sigh doesn’t reach this. It is not that they should be frightened. It is a matter of pure common sense. Given, that this life must soon come to an end; given, also, that this life as at present constituted, is not worth the living; given, on the other hand, that there is a life to come that will never end, and one that is vastly superior to this life, since in it we shall realise the very object of being, which we catch only faint and casual glimpses of at present; given, also, that the means of getting that is by giving this—and what course would common sense suggest? It is not a matter of fear. A man

deliberately makes a choice. A man's religion should never be a Sunday religion, or a death-bed religion. It should not be the kind of sentiment that depends on tragedy; that is melted by the sun or blown away by the breezes of the mountain top. It should be a matter of wisdom, deep set, logical, real—a something that is continually present, and takes full and calm possession of the mind.

I do not mean to say that fear should have no bearing upon it; for all things are of God. By all our fears, and all our hopes, and all our expectations, we ought to give heed to the calling that is in Christ. It is almost derogatory to the matter to call it "important," or apply to it any of those mild commendations which imply a reservation in favour of something more important still. There should be no tinkering with the truth. It should stand at the top. Some make a profession of it, but live for secular objects. They seem to consider the truth very good; but that the really important matters relate to property and family, which with them are of supreme and crowning importance. They stand on the platform of secular life, and patronise the truth. God will accept no man's patronage. Christ will not accord to any man a position in the future who does not surrender to him the present; for his request is, that we leave all things in a mental point of view, for him; that is to say, that we should prefer everything pertaining to the future, vastly before the trifles connected with the present. To use the familiar and oft-repeated words, but which cannot be burnt too deeply into our minds,

"If any man come after me, and forsake not all things, he cannot be my disciple; if anyone love father or mother, husband, wife or children, houses or land, more than me, he is not worthy of me."

These words ought continually to ring in our ears, for we shall awake some day to the time when they will be applied. We shall find ourselves in the presence of the august personage who spoke these words, and who will compel us to witness the review of our own lives; and although he is meek and lowly, yet when he comes the second time, he is to take the position of Judge, and to manifest God's anger toward all unrighteous men; and it will be a fearful thing to fall into his hands.

Next to love in the truth, we have to cultivate kindness. We are to do good unto all men, as we have opportunity. Christ says that if we do good only to those who do good to us, we are no better than the Pharisees and the sinners. Patient commiserative benevolence must characterise our dealings with those without. In the world, from the highest politician to the meanest street sweep, retaliation is the order of the day. As soon as anybody shows the cold shoulder, the result is to resent. This must not be so with us. Christ has given commandment how we ought to walk. John says we deceive ourselves if we say we are children of God, and do not His commandments. We are commanded to overcome evil with good, and not return evil for evil. The good deeds of those who are God's will not depend upon external incitement, or attraction, or upon personal benefit, but will bud forth as from an internal sap, and well up as from a spring. Doubtless the good things done for those who are Christ's will be very thorough, very cordial, very delightful; at the same time, the unthankful and the evil must come in for a share of our beneficence.

We see people who are ungrateful, who are inferior, and low and vulgar and unworthy; nevertheless, having Christ in view, we are enabled to do good to them. It is a good discipline: but if we keep Christ out of view, we shall only consider our own feelings, and bestow our benefits where they will be appreciated. We have a good many things to learn, and many of them difficult to learn; but we must ever try to submit to the divine lessons. The children of God are to be like their Father, who sendeth rain upon the just and upon the unjust.

At the same time, that is quite a different thing from love. Though God sends His benefits upon the wicked He does not love them; the very opposite—we are told that He hates them (Psalm 11:5). He is angry with the wicked: "*My soul hateth the proud man,*" He says; and to certain people who brought their sacrifices with uncleanness, He said "*These are a smoke in my nostrils: a fire that burneth all the day.*" Therefore to be like God we are not required to do a moral impossibility; for it is a moral impossibility to love everybody. We can be kind: that is another thing. It is possible to be kind—to take a benevolent interest in people, saying as it were to ourselves, "Well, poor things, there they are, very inferior sort of people, no doubt, but for the moment, they cannot help it, and we must try to be good to them." We can bring ourselves to this; but to arrive at the point of love is impossible.

God does not ask us to do what He doesn't do Himself; and He doesn't love the wicked—neither does Jesus; for he is coming to destroy them. But he is kind and patient for the present, and so must we be.

Only have patience, and all things will come right; God doesn't allow us to put them right. We cannot put them right if we would; it is impossible. Christ will do it for us: he will put everybody into his place, by-and-bye. He will extirpate from the earth those who do iniquity, and exalt the righteous to life and joy for ever.

The earth belongs to Jesus. At present it is in wrong hands, and in consequence there is a great deal of misery. But there is a good time coming, when the Lord of the Earth will take possession. Our meeting this morning has reference to that good time. The truth points us to that good time. We cannot love a person in the truth, who is not in love with that good time and with him who is to bring it about. The gospel is the glad tidings of God's purpose to bless all the world, and make His will done here as it is in heaven; and if we will only be patient and wait, and be like Abraham (who against hope believed in hope), and be faithful in all circumstances, we may hope that when Jesus—who is here represented by the symbols on the table—comes, he may judge us not unworthy of a place in that glorified throng, who shall unite in a song in which there shall be no jar—no cracked voices, and no imperfection.

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, who hath redeemed us to God by his blood, and has made us kings and priests, and we shall reign upon the earth.”

Taken from “The Christadelphian” of 1868

Sunday Morning Pages 133-137

& “The Christadelphian” of 1903

Sunday Morning Pages 196-200

By Bro. Robert Roberts