
Enmity of Classes

IN the psalm read this morning, we have David again among his enemies and praying to be delivered from their wiles. It is remarkable how constantly this feature presents itself, not only in the Psalms, but in the personal writings of the other prophets. It is true the ultimate application is to Christ (both in head and body), the “testimony” for whom, both as to his sufferings and the glory that shall be realised, is the very “spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10), but in the first instance, the constant picture of conflict with malicious enemies was realised in the experience of the prophets themselves. This picture is not comprehended by merely literary readers of the writings of the spirit. It is in fact made a ground of their rejection by some. They argue that the product of inspiration would not have been marred (as they regard it) by this constant exhibition of strife on the part of the writers. Their ideal of such matters would lead them to expect tranquil discourse of the sublime order of Gentile poets and philosophers. They are not aware that the very peculiarity which they interpret as against the writings in question, is one of the strongest evidences of their genuineness in all senses. Two things require it: first, the plan of God as disclosed in the Scriptures, and secondly, the character of mankind as we actually find it. The plan as revealed is to “take out from among” the bulk, a certain “few” who are chosen, on the principle of faith and obedience under difficulty. These are to be “delivered from the present evil world,” as Paul expresses it, after they have faithfully endured for an appointed time, the tribulation incident to being in it, while not of it. This being the plan (and no man believing the Scriptures can say this is not the plan revealed therein), a state of incompatibility and consequent enmity between the “few” and the many is the inevitable result. The character of mankind in their bulk, is of course the inciting cause of this enmity. This character is defined in the Scriptures by the phrase “desperately wicked.” Genteel people don’t agree with this definition, but it is true, nevertheless, as any one may perceive who judges the character of the world by the scriptural rule of action. Wickedness according to this rule, is the forgetting of God, the omission to constantly do the highest honour to Him, the ignoring of His will in expression of our thoughts and the formation of our purposes; and the doing contrary to his commandments in the many matters that go to constitute “life.” Judge the world by this rule and you see at once that John’s testimony is true that “the world lieth in wickedness.” God is absolutely ignored and His law cast aside with contempt. The sole rule of action is self-interest in one form or the other. In some cases it takes a very refined form; but in its essence it is the same—the rejection of God, the service of natural inclination. The love of money—the love of honour, the love of ease, or the love of appetite will be found to comprehend the motives that rule the world: for the obedience of the powers that be spring from these. There would be no respect for authority if it were not for the power in the hands of authority to interfere with the things that are dear to the world’s heart. But for the restraints imposed by this power, society would soon be a chaos.

Where the world is at liberty to do as it likes, such as the society it shall choose, the causes it shall support, the way it shall spend its spare money and spare time, you see the cloven hoof at once. It honours those who flatter it; it gives itself to those things that pander to its inclinations or fill its pocket, and all this with the utmost “respectability.” Those things that are pleasing to its carnal-mind are in high esteem with it. The things of the spirit are not only unintelligible to it, they are distasteful to it when even faintly understood; yea, they are most odious to it, and all who preach them are an abomination. It hates those who preach the truth, because the truth is something it detests, and by “the truth” is meant something higher than that phrase means in the mouths of some people. It means, not merely that man is

mortal, that Christ will come, that the Jews will be restored, the dead will be raised, &c.; these are but branches of the tree. The vitality of the tree lies in the root, and the root in this case is the relation of God to man. Tell the world the truth on this point, and the world will hate you. It does not like to be told that God is its possessor; that His honour should be its highest virtue; His obedience its highest pleasure; that it is not at liberty to do as it likes; that Christ is the heir of all things; that he will bring vengeance and destruction because of its wickedness. It burns with anger against those who say that it is not righteous; that it is astray from the right way; that even its goodness is besmeared with the mire of carnal motive. It is so sensitive on this point that even if this testimony is confined to example, it resents it, and brands with evil-speaking the objects of its hatred.

In view of these things it is not difficult to understand that peculiarity of the Psalms of David which shews us the writer in continual conflict with surrounding enemies, and exercised greatly towards them, as in the Psalm this morning, wherein he says, "Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer; preserve my life from fear of the enemy. Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the secret workers of iniquity, who whet their tongues like a sword and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words, that they may shoot in secret at the perfect"—(Psalm 64:1, 4.) This experience is no accident, nor was it exceptional in David's case. It was the experience of the Lord himself, as of course, the words of David, (referring ultimately to Christ) required. It is the experience of all who follow in their steps. Jesus declared this would be the case. "In the world ye shall have tribulation. Marvel not if the world hate you. Ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you." Plainly also did he say, "Ye cannot serve two masters," and this principle he has applied to all who obey him, in declaring through James, Paul, and John, that "The friendship of the world is enmity with God. All that is in the world is not of the Father." "Love not the world."

There are two ways of looking at this. The first is, that the truth calls us to submit to something that is very disagreeable to bear. As nothing is sweeter to the majority of men than honour, so nothing is more bitter than to be treated as the offscouring of all things. There are a thousand little ways in which honour can be given or withheld, and it may be that the little ways are more telling than the big ones. The bow of hearty recognition is sweeter than a testimonial: the turning away of the countenance may be more galling than public execration. To the loss of the former and the inheritance of the latter, a faithful course in the truth will bring any man. What shall we say to it? Why, that if we are the genuine brethren of the apostolic band of the first century, we shall rejoice to be counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. This leads to the other reflection. There is a natural desire in every earnest mind to have the opportunity of suffering thus for Christ's sake. Some such may bewail their lack. Such discontentment ought to be banished at once. It is next door to running into persecution, which is sinful. We ought to wait God's testing opportunities. They will come in due time if we are worthy of them, and if they are not His, they are worthless. No reasonable mind will seek discomfort or persecution. The belief, profession, and practice of the principles of the truth ought to be our aim. If these are steadfastly and consistently maintained, the dishonour and the enmity which these always provoke in the present evil world, will not be long in manifesting themselves.

And the words of Christ in the portion read from Luke, reminds us that these will be found "within" as well as "without." He says, "It must needs be that offences come." The context shows he is speaking of the brethren. All who are the called are not the chosen. Many

are called but few are chosen. The reason of this is that the choice is limited to those who are led by the Spirit of God. "As many as are led of the Spirit of God, they are the children of God." A man who is guided by the ideas communicated by the Spirit through the apostles is guided by the Spirit; for these ideas, in their communicated form, are the power of the Spirit in the world for the effectuation of its work. Now, all who profess the truth do not walk in it, but walk after the desires and inclinations of the natural man. There always are in the truth those who are of the flesh and those who are of the Spirit. For this reason, offences will come, and "it must needs be." It is part of the appointed discipline by which the affections of the spiritual are shaken loose from all human ties and associations, and made to rest on the eternal foundation. It is, therefore, a mistake to look for a perfect community, or to expect that at any time we may reckon on freedom from trouble henceforward. There will be trouble as long as the present state of things last. Man is born to it. The fact helps us to take it without dismay or discouragement. Forgetfulness of the fact has worked disastrously, in some cases, when the trouble came.

But there is the other side: "*Woe unto that man by whom they come*: it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones." Here is a great caution to our ways. Let none of us suffer as an evildoer. —(1 Peter 4:15.) Let none of us be in trouble through misdeeds; let none of us be on the wrong side of the "offences" when they come. It is well to realise what "offences" mean here. Does it mean hurting people's feelings? If so, how shall we obey the command to reprove the "unfruitful works of darkness?" —(Eph. 5:11.) Christ hurt the feelings of the Pharisees: for it is written that on one occasion, the Pharisees were "offended" when they heard what Jesus said. —(Matt. 15:12.) It is impossible to avoid hurting the feelings of those who are in the wrong in testifying against the wrong. This is not what Jesus meant by "offence." The word "offence" had a stronger meaning in English in the days of James I. than it has now. It fails now to convey the full meaning of the original word, which is to hurt substantially; to cause to stumble; to bring into mischief. The idea is expressed by Paul where he says, "Through thy knowledge shall the weak brother PERISH, for whom Christ died"—(2 Cor. 8:11). Woe to the man who turns believers out of the way. Here is a lesson of a sobering character which wise men will apply in many ways. It is a check against reckless independence of action. We have to consider consequences as affecting others. We may feel ourselves at liberty to do many things as between ourselves and God, which we shall be deterred from doing if we consider its probable effects upon those who may not discern so clearly. It is in this respect that Paul says, "We that are strong ought to bear with them that are weak, and not to please ourselves." He advised the strong-minded brother of the first century not to eat meat in the idol's temple, though to good sense, the idol was nothing, and the meat good, and the temple a beautiful shelter from the weather; because a weaker-minded brother might construe his act into a participation with the idolatry, and might be emboldened to do things which would defile his conscience. In our day, the duty of consideration for others has shifted from idolatry to the ways of the world. There are many things we might do if we had only ourselves to consider. But when we reflect that our liberty may help to drive back into bondage those who are struggling to be free, it will help us to deny ourselves. If we abandon circumspection in such matters, we shall find at last we have made a mistake. "Am I my brother's keeper?" is the question of Cain, and all who go through life with this sentiment in their mouths will find themselves in Cain's company on the day of straightening. Christ's commandment is "Love one another," and the only thing that will yield satisfaction in that great day, will be the knowledge of having obeyed the commandments of Christ.

This brings us to a saying of Christ's which is written in the chapter read from Luke: "When ye shall have done all these things which are commanded you, say We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which was our duty to do." Several things suggest themselves as we reflect on this. The first is an apparent contradiction between this and that part of Christ's teachings, wherein he says the unprofitable servant will be cast out and the profitable servant only accepted. The apparent contradiction arises from the use of the same word in two connections. There is no real contradiction. The unprofitable servant to be cast out was one who yielded no fruit, who lived in disobedience of his Lord's commands; the "unprofitable servants" of the saying under consideration are those who have "done all those things which were commanded them." The question is, in what sense are those unprofitable servants who have "done those things which are commanded?" The answer is not far for right reason to seek. In the utmost we do in "working out our own salvation," we cannot profit God. The benefit is all to ourselves. God condescends to count our faith and obedience for righteousness; but it is not for any advantage it is to Him He is pleased with our submission, but not advantaged by it. We cannot advantage Him, for of Him and to him, and through him are all things. Consequently, when we come to stand before the judgment seat of Christ with ever so good an account of our stewardship, we can claim nothing on the score of services rendered. It is of the goodness of God we are permitted to serve, and it is of His goodness that service will be rewarded. The highest reason enjoins the attitude prescribed by Jesus. After we have done all that is commanded, we have only done our duty and have not profited God. In this sense, the accepted will acknowledge themselves unprofitable servants.

But in this there is no ground of consolation for those who are truly unprofitable. On the contrary, it forbids hope for such; for if those who have "done all those things which are commanded them," are instructed to regard themselves as "unprofitable servants," what is the position of those who have neglected "all those things which are commanded them," and who have made self-interest their rule? If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" The answer is plain; "Every man shall receive *according to his work*." If a man live to the flesh with the flesh which is a perishing thing, he shall die. Only those who live to God, in the full affection of the gospel and submission to all its requirements, may hope for favour in the day of eternal life. This is revealed, and however unpleasant some may find the reiteration of these things to be, it would be no true kindness to speak otherwise He only speaks the word faithfully who declares the truth without regard to the likes or dislikes of men. The day will come—yea, is at the door, when the importance of these principles will be seen by every eye. It will be seen too late for the majority who "with weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth," will curse the folly which led them to give a secondary place to the true sayings of God. Our wisdom is to lay hold of them and exalt them and obey them now, while the long-suffering of God waits as in the days of Noah. Soon our opportunity will be past. Soon will ring in the startled ear of the heedless, the solemn words which have been written a long time for our warning; "When I called ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear, but did evil before mine eyes and did choose that wherein I delighted not. Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry; behold my servants shall drink but ye shall be thirsty; behold my servants shall rejoice but ye shall be ashamed. Behold my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart and shall howl for vexation of spirit. And ye shall leave your name for a curse to my chosen."— (Isaiah 65:13–15.)— ED.

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