

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 10

ONCE MORE, we have the privilege of assembling in pursuance of the commandment of Christ, delivered to his disciples before he departed from them into heaven. We may be very thankful that he gave that command, for otherwise, we should have had no scriptural ground for periodical assembly, that is to say, not such ground as would have enabled faithful servants to silence quibblers. But for such commandment, many would have been found to say that it was not necessary, and not obligatory to meet together in a stated and collective capacity, to celebrate the love of Christ. It would appear that there were some of that class in Paul's day, even among those who believed the truth, for he says—

“Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is.”

So that it had been *“the manner of some”* in those days to stay away from the assembly, to stay at home, to take it easy, to excuse themselves the trouble of coming out stately to the meetings of the brethren, under the idea, no doubt, that it was unnecessary for them to attend the meetings, and that they could serve God as effectively in the quietness and seclusion of home as in the assembly. Now, God, in these things is always wiser than we; and the very fact of Christ commanding his disciples to assemble for the purpose of breaking bread, must be taken as proof that it is in itself a wise thing. A moment's reflection will show it is so.

Our position in Christ requires us to be active and faithful in the discharge of the duties that devolve upon us in ordinary life. We have not to withdraw ourselves from the world; Jesus and Paul distinctly prohibited such a thing. That they might be kept **from the evil that was in the world**, was Christ's prayer concerning the disciples.

“I pray not,” he said, *“that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil.”*

Paul also says, reminding the Corinthians of an exhortation he had given them, not to keep company with a certain class of individuals, *“yet not the fornicators of this world, for then must needs ye go out of the world.”* But if any man that is called a brother, be of the description that he specifies, then we are not to keep his company as a brother. As regards the world, we are to be in it, but not of it; we are to bear our testimony in it, but not fellowship it; we are to serve God in it, but not league ourselves with it; we are to glorify Him by refusing the evil in it, and choosing the good, by bearing witness for Christ's name before men; that the light of our testimony may perchance entice good and honest hearts into the right way, and thus multiply the jewels which God will make up in the day of Christ's glory.

We could have no such opportunity were we to seclude ourselves in a cloister, as many deluded souls do under the specious idea of giving themselves to God. We must not in any shape imitate their great crime. They err, not knowing the scriptures. They err through the power of philosophy and vain deceit. They think that solitude and bodily inactivity will promote their spiritual interests, which they conceive to lie in the supposed immortal soul, which is a mere invention of the philosophy of pagan Greece; and which, by intermixture with the gospel of Christ, has led men off the path of duty in even these little matters. It has made them reason thus: “The body is of no value; the soul is the pearl; the soul is of God. I must nurse the immortal soul; and I cannot do this effectually unless I get out of the way of human sights and sounds, and keep the body under by starving it—doing penance, &c.”

Now the religion of Christ teaches us the opposite of this. It teaches us to go into the world, to be active like himself—to develop by experience: to learn obedience by suffering. He is the exemplification of what we ought to be; he mingled with men, and was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. It is true he withdrew himself occasionally, and sought opportunity in the retirement and silence of the mountain top, to hold that communion with God which cannot take place in the midst of busy life; and every true son and daughter of the Almighty will resemble him in this, that they will thirst for occasional solitude, to draw deeply from the fountain of spiritual strength and consolation. Yet it will only be to return with greater zest to the work of doing the will of Him who pleases to make use of evil in the development of the highest good. Everyone who realises the position to which we are called in Christ, will appreciate the privilege of retiring from the busy and

distracted world, to coolly and quietly contemplate those relations of being which are forgotten and altogether ignored by those who are all the while in the busy stream of life.

Now this gathering together to break bread is one of those opportunities which Christ has mercifully made compulsory. He has not left it to our faithless hearts and undiscerning eyes, to decide what shall be best in such a matter. He knew how we should be beset, without and within. He needed not that any should tell him what was in man, for he knew; and he gave us a very good indication of his mind in the matter, by speaking of a certain class who should receive the word, but in whom the cares and pleasures and riches of the world should choke the word, so that it should become unfruitful. He saw the danger to which we are all exposed in the matter; and that danger is not a small or a remote one. We are of necessity in the world, and engaged in its occupations, and the power of these upon our minds is very great, on account of the strength of things immediately seen and heard, and the weakness of mental discernment; and if there were no counteracting influence brought into play, we should be overcome of the world. We should devote ourselves to merely worldly objects, and be governed by merely worldly sentiments.

But we must overcome the world, and that which overcometh the world, John says is our faith.

“This is the victory that overcometh the world—even our faith.”

But our faith is a tender plant: it is not a thing that grows with spontaneous growth; it requires culture and constant care; it comes from the outside.

“Faith cometh by hearing,” and *“faith is the substance of things hoped for.”*

We hope for them because God has promised them; and we know that He has promised them, because we have been informed—because we have heard. But all knowledge grows dim if it is not renewed, and so does this. We must *“keep in memory”* the things apostolically delivered. If we *“at any time let them slip,”* we lose our anchor, and drift in the current of mortality, to be dashed to pieces on death’s inhospitable strand. To bring to mind, to keep in mind, to renew our faith, then, are the great desiderata. This is the true meaning of edification: the building of one another up in our most holy faith. Now that which gives us the faith in the first instance is that which must keep the faith. The reading that will plant the faith is the reading that will preserve and nurture it.

The human mind is like shifting sand in relation to everything—not only in relation to things divine, but things human; though more especially things divine. Human memory is a very feeble thing. The substance of the mind, as it were, is always on the move—always changing, always receiving new impressions, new thoughts. The thoughts and impressions of yesterday are feebler today than when first received; and as time goes on, they become feebler, until we are almost unconscious of them. To keep a thing constantly in the mind, it must be held continually in contact with it in some shape or form. The faces of friends seen daily are not forgotten. Now the truth is our great friend. If we look in its face daily, we shall keep it in mind; but if we live in neglect of it, if we abandon or refrain from reading the scriptures, or assembling one with another, the face of friend Truth will become dim. The impressions that the truth has made upon our minds will gradually fade, until they disappear altogether, and we shall become worldly-minded. What a mistake for any of us to give the preference to any friend above friend Truth. Friend Business, Friend Sociality, Friend Enjoyment, will cheat us at last; but Friend Truth is a tree of life to them that lay hold of her. Happy is everyone that receiveth her; she will never deceive us but be precious and refreshing to our last mortal hour, and crown us with life and joy for evermore.

There is one thing always welling up from within—always active and growing—never requiring cultivation; and that is the disposition that John thus describes.

“The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.”

These things grow in the flesh, for they are of the flesh, but the other (the faith of Christ) does not. The other is a plant of heavenly origin, and if we do not carefully nurture the good seed from which it grows, it very quickly becomes extinguished by the rank and vigorous weeds which spring with rapid self-growth. So we can see the great wisdom of Jesus in making this a standing institution for his people, that they should assemble themselves together for the express purpose of remembering him; for this is the object.

“Do this,” he says, *“in remembrance of me.”*

All that is in the world greatly helps to dim the feeble image of Christ that has been formed within us by the belief of the truth, but when we are called round the table, we are called to contemplate him

anew. And surely we cannot if we have received the truth come to the table, without having his image revived before us. We had better not come if this is not the result. Paul teaches a serious responsibility in connection with attendance upon this act, he says: if any man eat and drink unworthily, he is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, that is, if he eats without discerning the Lord's body, not perceiving, not recognising the things symbolised by the bread and wine. Our duty this morning, therefore, is to realise Christ. If it was necessary for the original disciples, who had seen him, who had sojourned in Judea with him, who had witnessed his living acts, and heard his living voice, if it was necessary for them to do this that they might remember him, how much more necessary is it for us, who have never seen him, and in whose minds the only impression of him is that created by the truth, which is a very feeble impression, except where the truth is most devoutly and most earnestly studied and held. Let us, on all such occasions, pass in mental review, the truth we know. Let us bring forth from the mental treasury things new and old. This, however, is only possible where we are "*scribes well instructed in the kingdom,*" and in our day, we can only get into this condition by daily reading of the scriptures. If we neglect to read the scriptures, we shall find ourselves entirely out of harmony with the system of things that will be manifested at the coming of Christ.

The symbols on the table remind us that we have to fellowship the sufferings of Christ meantime. We may get to the crown afterwards, but at present, we have to fellowship the cross; we have to fellowship the "*man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,*" who was despised and rejected of men; and this, not merely in the breaking of bread, for that is the easiest part of it, but in the actual shaping of our lives. We fellowship his sufferings to some extent in identifying ourselves with the truth. Many people admire the sufferings of Christ historically, but when it comes to their turn, they act the coward. They cannot stoop to the practical fellowship. The truth is presented, and they say "Yes, it looks like the truth, we cannot gainsay it, but what are we to do? It would isolate us from all society, and cut us off from much usefulness in the world; we should be looked upon as madmen." And they are not prepared for that; they are not prepared to pay the price; they are not prepared to sell themselves to Christ; they like to be part and parcel of the present system; they like to be esteemed of men. It may be that in words they do not reject the truth; but actions are louder than words; they deny Christ before man because of the consequences. We must steel ourselves against this, even if it comes to wandering in sheep skins, and goat skins, and in dens and caves of the earth. If we are to fellowship Christ in his glory, we must fellowship him in his humiliation. If we are to partake of the glory that shall be revealed, we must partake of the suffering of this present time. There are many sufferings connected with the fellowship of Christ, even in our time, and one of them is indicated in the chapter that has been read this morning. —(Rom. 11).

It is the duty of those who are Christ's to be subject to the powers that be, which, in an exalted sense, are ordained of God. The powers that be constitute the order of things necessary for the present stage of affairs. If there were no rule, anarchy would reign. The passions of men—the selfish instincts of men, let loose, would run riot, and bring about universal confusion like what we see in barbarous countries; and such a state of society would be incompatible with the work which God is doing. He is using sinners to subdue the earth, and prepare it for habitation; and He is preparing from among those sinners, a family for Himself, of sons and daughters, by a belief and obedience of the truth. Now if there were no such thing as society, with its law and order—if the world was in a state of chaos, as it inevitably would be without the presence and operation of authority among men, God's work would not be done. We could not assemble here this morning, for instance, if there no authority. We are under the wing of authority. If there were no government, we should be a prey to the violence and hatred of all who oppose us; we should be pulled limb from limb, instead of being allowed to sit quietly here, to meditate on these things which God has revealed. Towards that authority and those governments, our duty is one of submission. Those who resist the authority resist God. As Daniel says, God setteth up kings and putteth them down.

But it may be asked, if the powers that be are ordained of God, why should we look forward with desire to a time when God will destroy them? The answer is, because He has promised it, and because their present use by God is only a controlling of evil, for the furtherance of His own righteous purposes. The wicked are the sword of the Lord. He ruleth in the kingdoms of men, and doeth according to His will; but the kingdoms of men are nevertheless evils of a rank type—necessary evils for the present state—providently guided for the accomplishment of the divine ends. But why is He going to put aside that which at the present stage meets with His approbation? The answer is, that we

use an instrument in the crude stage of any process of manufacture which is quite unfit for the more advanced state of work to be done. That is how it is here: the preliminary part of God's purpose to save the world, requires the organizations called the "*kingdoms of men.*"

These kingdoms of men have existed for six thousand years; but when the work has advanced to a certain point, He will set them aside, and interpose the kingdom of His Son. He will pull down the mighty from their seats, and Jesus will rule.

"The Lord shall be King over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Lord, and His name one."

The kingdoms of men will then have been broken to pieces: still Christ's people are at present to be submissive to them. It is impossible that Christ's people can take part in any revolutionary movement. They are prohibited from drawing the sword, and prohibited by the spirit of their calling from taking part in the political movements of their times. They are God's people, "*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people,*" who are unconnected with the movements of men. They are in the world, but not of it. It is their part to leave the world to do its own business. Now it is not agreeable to the flesh to conform to this position. The democratic feeling is very strong in human nature. It is the feeling expressed in the words—

"We are our own: who is lord over us?"

Practically it takes the form of patriotism, and makes a man rejoice in being part and parcel of the institutions of the land, and in having the right to exercise the "sacred duty" of defending the soil. More mildly, it makes a man pride himself in the use of the franchise which he calls a "birthright;" and leads him to join with alacrity in the various movements that politicians set agoing for the care of the world on the democratic basis.

Now it is impossible that these sentiments can exist in a breast where the truth reigns supreme. The divine law will extinguish practical politics. It will fill a man with distaste for Gentilism in every shape and form, and substitute the love of God's kingdom, and God's affairs. The politics pertaining to the commonwealth of Israel will become his politics. It is impossible that a Christadelphian can be a patriot or a soldier. "Christian patriotism" is an invention of the flesh. It is one of the "*good words and fair speeches*" by which the simple are deceived. The political attitude of a Christadelphian is submission to the existing powers, living peaceably with all men, except where the truth is concerned. For the truth we are to contend earnestly, and the weapons of this warfare are mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds; though not so mighty as they were in the days of Paul, when Christ's soldiers were armed with the powers of the spirit. This is our warfare.

We are not to touch the conflicts of the world. We are to pay tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom is due, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour. We are to be the most peaceful of citizens, the most loyal of subjects, so far as deference to authority is concerned. We are to submit to every ordinance of man, where it does not conflict with our duty to God. Our submission, however, is not out of deference to human authority, but from obedience to divine law; we submit because God tells us to submit—(1 Pet. 2:13) as a duty to Christ, not as a compliment to rulers. We must in all things be subject till Christ returns to execute the judgment written; Christadelphians, therefore, are the most obedient of subjects. At the same time we do not for one moment surrender the contention that kings and emperors are usurpers. God allows the wicked to rule for his own purpose, and we submit to him. He made use of Nebuchadnezzar as his servant, although Nebuchadnezzar knew him not. Nebuchadnezzar thought it was his own hand that was doing what God was causing him to perform. That is just how it is in regard to the nations of the earth; they do not know God, but God is using them. Yet we do not surrender the fact that they are mere usurpers; Jesus did not surrender this fact, though he submitted. The tax gatherer came to Peter (he was evidently afraid to come to Jesus) and said,

"Does not your master pay tribute?"

Peter told Jesus, and Jesus said to Peter,

"Of whom do the kings of the earth take tribute, of their own children or of strangers?"

In this, he was drawing a premise concerning himself and those who were his, from the fact that tribute was always levied upon strangers; that it was the nations subject to Rome that always paid the taxes—the Romans themselves being free. Peter replied, "*Of strangers.*" Jesus says, "*Then are the*

children free;” as much as to say “We are the children; they have no right to impose tribute upon us.” Yet, though asserting the fact in the shape of a mild protest, he added,

“Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go cast a hook into the sea, and the first fish that comes will have money in its mouth; that take and pay for thee and me.”

This is as good a lesson as we could hear on our political duty. As British subjects, we will submit to British law as Jesus submitted to Roman law, the while protesting against the legitimacy of its claim, and standing apart from the machinery of its politics as he did.

As a British subject, a man has to pay a considerable price to become a Christadelphian. It is more than some people are prepared to do, to not only pay taxes but to surrender their political birthright, and become partisans of “*another king, one Jesus,*” whose service at present is one of ignominy. But it is a glory and a joy to those who comprehend the duty we owe to the position to which we are called. It is one way of suffering with Christ; it is one way of showing that this is not our time; that we have here no continuing city; that we seek one to come; that like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, being persuaded of the promises, we have embraced them and confess that we are strangers and pilgrims in the earth. There are other worldly drawbacks connected with the service of Christ. Those who receive the truth are mostly poor people, like the disciples of old; and if one may be connected with the rich and the learned, it is a crucifixion and a suffering to have to keep the company of the poor and illiterate; and yet we have to do it—to the poor the gospel is preached.

“God has chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him.”

There is another feature of the case that involves sacrifice and labour and suffering. Christ has said—

“Let him that heareth say ‘Come’”

Everyone is not prepared to be a missionary; yet they must: it is an obligation upon everyone receiving the truth, to the extent of their opportunities and abilities, to say “*Come.*” Now to say “*Come*” one must labour, do thankless work, spend many toilsome moments, and spend money—some in greater and some in lesser degree—according to opportunity. The majority of people are not prepared to put forth labour except in that which will produce some present substantial advantage. They will patiently labour, for instance, for the purchase of some article of furniture upon which they have set their mind, or to procure some distinction; but they are not prepared to labour and spend and be spent for something that brings them no present return, which those who are Christ’s have to do. Above all, they are not prepared to spend money. They do spend money readily enough for that which is not bread; they do lay out their substance upon things that will soon end in the dust; but they are not wise enough to be prepared to invest their money on things which will constitute a treasure laid up where neither moth nor rust can corrupt, nor where thieves can break through and steal; and which will be brought forth in glory to be enjoyed for ever at the coming of Christ.

Then we are commanded to do good unto all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith; we are to give to the poor. This is another thing which few people are prepared to do in the way and in the spirit prescribed. They have no objections to do it, if there is a subscription list, where they can see their name among others; but they do not like Christ’s way of doing it—keeping their left hand in ignorance of what their right hand does. The majority do not care for doing good at all. The majority are not Christ’s people. To do good and communicate we must forget not.

These are specimens of what we are called upon to be and to do in Christ. It is no light matter to become a Christadelphian. Jesus might well say to the people that were following him in crowds,

“If any man is not prepared to sacrifice everything for me, he cannot be my disciple.”

“Which of you,” says he, *“wants to build a tower and does not first sit down and count whether he is able to do it?”*

It is no very small matter to believe the truth—though a very easy and pleasant thing. The truth is so clear and so glorious in itself, that this believing it is the easiest part of our duty; but we may nevertheless fail to become Christ’s servants in deed and in truth. It is in the doing of Christ’s word that we gain the victory. It is in the keeping of his commandments that we have great reward. In the keeping of these, we must needs fellowship his sufferings, and shall then find his companionship at the table a new and delightful and a very profitable thing.

Taken from: - "The Ambassador" of 1868
Sunday Morning No. 10
Pages 305-310
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