

The World

IN our day, we stand related to the same system of things in society that prevailed in another form in the days of David and Jesus. That system, as existing in their day, is reflected in the portions of Scripture read this morning. David says, "*Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? Do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men? Yea, in heart ye work wickedness.*" Here was a "congregation" and a generation professedly speaking righteousness and judging uprightly, and yet in reality practising the principles of wickedness, when their conduct was estimated according to the divine standard. Jesus, in the same way, said of the ruling class of his day, "*Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees*"; "*Do not according to their works ... all their works they do for to be seen of men.*" The Pharisees were the leaders of the people, in whose eyes they "*outwardly appeared righteous.*" They were highly esteemed for a reputation of superior sanctity, which they laboured to preserve by long prayers and neglected toilet. Jesus said, "*That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.*" The common run of men have a difficulty in understanding this. It is because they have not learnt to see things as God sees them. Men can only acquire divine modes of thought by constant familiarity with the divine mind, as expressed in the Scriptures. This is the last thing men seek to cultivate. Consequently their views and their judgments of things are according to the natural mind and not according to God. Such men, living in the days of David or of Jesus, would have differed from them altogether in their estimate of society. They would have considered David and Jesus libellers of their contemporaries. They would have said of the people condemned, that they were respectable, and worthy, and highly moral people; for were they not active, brisk, prompt, business-like and polite, attending honestly to their own business; frugal and industrious in their ways, and conforming with all the religious practices of the age?

They would, in fact, have imputed superior virtue where Jesus and David declared iniquity to prevail. Whence the difference of judgment? In the difference of the rule of measurement. "*Men will praise thee when thou **doest well to thyself***" (Psa. 49:18). This is the human rule. When a man succeeds in business or inherits property, and lays out a vast expenditure in his surroundings—acquiring an estate, and lavishing luxuries on his wife and children, he is considered an estimable person. Doing well to his wife and family, he is "doing well to himself," and men praise him. But men of the principles of David and Jesus look upon the scene from a different standpoint, and come to a different conclusion as to what they see. They recognize a higher morality than enters into the heart of the natural man to conceive. There is a higher rule of action before their minds. The natural man sees only man: the spiritual man sees God. This is the difference between them; and it is a mighty difference. It explains all the divergences and antagonisms that have raged between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, in the history of the past and the experience of the present. The natural man, knowing nothing beyond human objects and human rules of action, sees his neighbour laying up treasure for himself, with all harmlessness; and recognizing no obligation to be "*rich towards God*" (Luke 12:21), he sees nothing wrong, and is amazed at the condemnations of Jesus. The man of the Spirit, looking on the same neighbour, says, "Well he is all right as regards men; but how is he towards God?" A man can rob God; and this is a far worse breach of morality than robbing man. Such a breach is thought nothing of in the world; in fact, it is a point of morality altogether outside their "ethics." Men can be steeped to the

neck in this kind of wickedness, without incurring the smallest degree of odium. In fact the odium is incurred when the principle is recognized and carried out. "The FIRST and the GREAT commandment" has reference to our duties towards God. Consequently, the disobedience of it is the first and the most heinous crime that can be committed. It is here that the world, in its most cultured and respectable form, is guilty of wickedness so great and prevailing, as to justify the description of John: "*The world lieth in wickedness.*" They live for themselves only and absolutely: the honour of God and the pleasure of God in the doing of those things He has commanded (and they are many) is absent from all their schemes and all their maxims. If this is true of the educated, what is the state of "the great unwashed"? The best description of the whole situation is that which says that "*the harvest of the earth is ripe: their wickedness is great.*" This description applies to the time in which we live; for it is alleged concerning the epoch now hard upon us, when God in Christ comes forth to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity (Isa. 26:21), taking vengeance on them that "*know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

The natural man, looking out upon British and American society, cannot see how the description applies. He thinks the world respectable and moral. Let him learn what true righteousness is, and his difficulty will be at an end. The first principle of acceptable righteousness is the giving to God of that which we owe to Him. The first principle of natural-man morality is the giving of that which we owe to ourselves. Herein is the difference. Judge the world by this principle, and you will come to a very different conclusion as to its state from that to which the natural man alias the carnal mind comes to. The world proceeds on the assumption that it exists for its own gratification and behoof; it ignores the fact that all things were made for the divine pleasure first. The world experiences no inconvenience from this, and therefore it perseveres. The sun shines, and the seasons come and go with their laden goodness; all things go steadily forward in an even course of prosperity for such as labour to do well for themselves; therefore their hearts are hardened in evil. "*Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil.*" But, as saith the same solemn voice, "*Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God ... for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil*" (Eccl. 8:11; 12:14). The difference between the children of God and the children of the devil is, that the children of God recognize that they are not their own, but the property of God, through Christ; and therefore live not for themselves, but for the honour of God and for the comfort of all His suffering friends around; while the children of the devil regard themselves as their own, and live for no higher end than the comfort of their own souls in all the honours and luxuries which their efforts can command; for the acquisition of which no labour is considered too great, no expense too lavish, and no occupation of time too excessive. Yet, having a keen relish for the praise of men, these respectable children of the devil in most cases try to keep up a character for "piety." They dearly love to be thought godly. Hence the state of things described and condemned in the portions of Scripture read. They professed regard for righteousness, and outwardly appeared righteous unto men.

This is precisely the state of things in our day. Religion is professedly the foundation upon which society is built; and most people strive after a character for religiousness. Yet, as in the days of David and Jesus, nothing is more rare than the righteousness with which God is pleased. Under the mask of piety, the world is wicked. Professedly religious, the world at heart is the very devil. The whole machinery of religion works like the rattling bones of a skeleton; and respectability is nothing more than the refined snobbery of a highly-garnished selfishness. "Everyone for himself," is their confessed motto; "God for us all" is the universal lie: for God has spoken and declared that He hates all workers of iniquity, and that His wrathful and utter extirpation of the whole generation of them, as at the flood and Sodom, is only a question of due time.

David refers to and prays for this time in the Psalm read: "*Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O Yahweh.*" This is a strong figure, but not so strong as the next: "*The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: **he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.** So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.*" This is as much as to say that at present, it would seem as if there was no reward for the righteous, and as if there was no God of judgment. This is precisely as it appears. The course of righteousness appears a course of fruitless sacrifice and unrequited labour; the righteous man appears a fool for his pains; and it would seem as if there were no intelligent God at work, with eyes beholding in every place, seeing the evil and the good, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart, and arranging to cause every man at last to find according to his ways. But this is all a mere appearance. When the time arrives for God to speak and to show bared the arm of His strength, these facts which at present are matters of faith, and which appear to be the flights of imagination, will shine out in blinding strength before the eyes of all nations. Then will be fulfilled the words by Malachi: "*Then shall ye return and discern **between the righteous and the wicked; between HIM THAT SERVETH GOD and him that serveth him not.***" Happy then will be the man who perseveres in faith, "against hope," like Abraham, "believing in hope," denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works (Titus 2:12-15).

The work of purifying such a people is principally conducted among the poor and the illiterate. It was a feature of the work in the days of Jesus, that "*the poor had the gospel preached unto them*" (Luke 7:22). It is the declaration of an apostle that "*God hath chosen the poor of this world*" (Jas. 2:5). The corollary of this is not left to mere inference, but is boldly expressed by Jesus himself: "*How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven!*" (Mark 10:23). In this arrangement, Jesus rejoiced. We find him saying in the other portion read: "***I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and the prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.***" Why has it seemed good in the sight of God to pass by the rich and the wise and the prudent, and to make choice of the poor and the "babes" in natural wisdom? There is a reason, and it is not difficult to find. Jesus gives us the clue in saying, "*Except a man humble himself as a little child, he shall in no wise*

enter into the kingdom of God." We get another clue in these other words of the Spirit, "**The fear of the Lord is the BEGINNING OF wisdom.**" "**They that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name,**" is a prophetic description of those accepted before Him in the day when He "*makes up His jewels*"; and this is expressly defined many times to be the basis of acceptable character before Him, namely, brokenness of spirit resulting from trembling reverence of His Word. The same idea is expressed in other words where we read, "*Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me*" (Jer. 9:23).

All these things put together enable us to see why God has not made choice of the rich and the educated, "*the wise and the prudent*": they think too much of themselves to be of any use to Him. His own glory is the first object in all His work; in this respect He is "*a jealous God*" (Joshua 24:19). The rich and the wise of this world take all the glory to themselves. Their own honour, their own interests, are the all-absorbing law of their lives. This is a universal rule with few exceptions. You can scarcely find a rich man saying, "I am rich, but God has made me so, and in thanksgiving to Him, I hold my privileges as a stewardship, of which He will require an account at my hands. I am cultivated in mind and well-favoured in flesh; but this gives me no ground of boasting. I have come to be so through circumstances that were not in my control. I thank God for it; I honour Him; I hold all from Him. I will show my submission to Him in having compassion on those less favoured, showing mercy to the poor and having a care of my neighbour as He has commanded." Rather do the rich build their nests on the loftiest heights of pride and cast God from their thoughts, and show no mercy to those of lower estate, whose fortune is just as little their own blame as the higher estate of the other is their credit. If the rich as such are unfit for God's purpose, how much more so are the "wise," who in the smattering acquaintance they have made with the works of God, swell with a conceit against Him which is marvellous to behold? Among the poor and the babes, God finds those who are glad to receive His goodness and praise His wisdom, and to abase themselves as the highest reason enjoins before the irresponsible prerogative of the Possessor of heaven and earth.

But let us not fall into a mistake on the other side. God hath chosen the poor in the world, but not because they are poor only. Millions of poor will rot for ever in the dust because they are nothing but poor—poor in purse, poor in mind, poor in intellect, poor in faith—poor in everything. If men have nothing but poverty as a ground of acceptance before God they will be as certainly unchosen as the purse-proud, unscrupulous, God-forgetting aristocrats. There is a certain thing in which the poor to whom the Gospel is preached must be "rich" before they will be chosen as the heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love Him. James defines this thing when he calls them "*the poor of this world—rich in faith*"—rich, rich, RICH! God's chosen are those who are "*rich in faith*." Abraham is said to be their father, because the prominent example of faith in ancient times and the holder of the promises. He was "**strong in faith,**" "**GIVING GLORY TO GOD**" (Rom. 4:20). Abraham's children will be all like him. The chosen of God, though mainly gathered from the poor, will be far from the mean, lean, spiritless, insipid, ignorant, vapid, and uninteresting class that some men imagine to be meant by the scriptural description. Though lowly in mind towards God, and poor, as a rule, in their present condition,

they will be the choicest of mankind in their intelligence, wisdom, and excellence. "*Filled with all wisdom,*" "*full of good fruits,*" is the New Testament description of their attainments. The religion of the apostasy has obscured this point much. It has made it appear that the great point is to have a soul saved from hell, however "*wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*" In fact, the viler the wretch, the more eligible for salvation, is the practical motto of the system. It is a relief to turn from such a disgusting practice to contemplate the beauty of apostolic teaching. The unprofitable will be rejected. The fruitful to and in the Spirit will alone be accepted. "**Rich in faith**" they will—**must**—all be. This implies a strong conviction of the truthfulness of the truth and a pointed appreciation of all it relates to, and an unfaltering choice of all it calls men to, even to the "*taking up of the cross*" to follow Christ in his present humiliation in the earth. Richness of faith must go beyond mere persuasion; there must be—not only belief that God will perform what He has promised, in raising the dead, and bringing the kingdom of the world into subjection to His Son, but there must be a doing of those things that have been commanded for those who do believe. "*Faith without works is dead, being alone.*" A man who says he believes, but lives in disobedience—either as regards things forbidden or things commanded—is of the class whom Paul condemns as those "*who profess that they know God, but in works deny him.*" Christ can be denied in more ways than one. You deny him, of course, if you say he was an impostor; you deny him also if believing in him, you are ashamed to confess him for fear of ridicule; but you deny him in the worst way of all if, believing in him and professing your belief, you live as if you believed in him not at all. Such is the man who says he believes the world is passing away, and Christ is coming, to whom we shall have to give an account, and that the kingdom of God will be our possession if he approves of us; but who bestows his whole energy in thoughts of labour to the building-up of his own temporal well-being in the present evil world. Such a man had need listen to the exhortation of James: "*Be ye DOERS of the word, and not hearers only, **deceiving your own selves.***" Many will find at last that they have been deceiving themselves in their hope of acceptance. Christ wants FRIENDS—men with hearts at his disposal—men given over to him—men with whom he is the governing idea, the star of their course, the mainspring of their movements, the inspiration of their life. He will have no use for the opinionists, theorists, and doctrinaires. Hair-splitting definitionists and worldly schemers will be equally unfit for the great work and the great society to be inaugurated at his second appearing. That work and that time will be for men only in whom he dwells by faith, and whose hearts, constrained by his enlightened love, impel them to a whole-souled attachment to his service at a time when all seek their own and not the things that are Jesus Christ's.

(Taken from "Seasons of Comfort" Volume 1, pages 210-215 by Bro. R. Roberts.)