

THE SURE FOUNDATION

It is a long time since the foundation was laid on which we stand in hope this morning; but there has been no decay in that foundation. There can be no decay in it. “Man decays and ages move,” but “the foundation of the Lord standeth sure.” Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid—Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and for ever. Men may disregard this foundation and try to lay foundations of their own, but what can come of their efforts but disappointment and dismay? They cannot find a bottom that will stay sound and secure; they cannot find materials that will hold together for any length of time. The ground turns to quagmire; their stones turn to sand. Time wrecks their best efforts, destroys their highest hopes.

“Man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?”

Who can bring a man from the grave? Who can give hope in death? The living are indifferent, whom the question concerns, and the dead know not anything. Men play with the question till the time is past. They fritter away their strength in fancies, in criminal negligence of the fact that God has given His answer and laid his foundation, than which there is no other for the children of men.

We are here this morning, because we have accepted this foundation. We do not boast of it; we are thankful for it; but we must assert it, and declare it, and contend for it; that away from the Christ preached by Paul, there is no hope, and that away from the ordinances delivered by his hand, men hope in vain to please God. Our particular business this morning, however is to rejoice in the hope, and at the same time to realize wherein we must be careful that we come not short of our hope, and wherein we must mix trembling with our mirth. The day of salvation will be a day of pure rejoicing, a day of unmixed gladness—gladness without precaution or reserve. But we have not come so far yet. As yet we listen to Paul’s exhortation:

“Let us therefore fear, lest”—lest we fail.

We have accepted Christ; will Christ accept us? This is a question that it is Christ’s prerogative alone to answer. Nevertheless, we may profitably discuss it, because the principles by which his choice will be determined, have been abundantly revealed. In our day, people are accustomed to think that it is sufficient if we accept Christ; that, in fact, we do Christ a favour, so to speak, in allowing ourselves to be saved. It is true that Christ has said (and we may rejoice greatly in his words),

“Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out,”

but there is a great deal more in the “coming” than most people realize. It means much more humility, much more anxiety, much more earnestness, much more ardour than would satisfy a modern clergyman. Christ speaks of “many” who will “come to him in that day” anxious to be saved, who will claim admittance to his kingdom and rehearse the grounds of their claim in the “wonderful works” done in his name. They “come” to Christ in a sense, but not in the right sense, and they will be cast out (for so Christ says), although he had said in the other case that he would in no wise cast out the man coming to him.

There will be a mass of suppliants for the favour of Christ when it is found he is in the earth, and that all judgment is in his hands. The suppliants are few now, although the fact of all judgment being in his hands is testified. A question that anxiously concerns all men is,

who among the mass of claimants for his favour will be chosen? We may find and meditate on the answer contained in a very simple and yet comprehensive declaration by the Spirit in David:

“The Lord hath chosen him that is godly for himself.”

HIM THAT IS GODLY. Here is something to consider. How shall we know *“him that is godly”*? How shall we learn what is meant by the words? We may know in one way only. God has not left us without instruction as to what constitutes godliness in His estimation. We need not be concerned about anybody else’s estimation. We shall waste our time in bootless search if we try to find out among the generality of men what entitles a man to be described by the words *“him that is godly.”* The idea of godliness has in our generation evaporated to next to nothing. It is almost an obsolete term; and where it is not obsolete, it is used to describe a state of mind, totally different from the godliness known to the writings of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles. Godliness is popularly conceived to be a sentimentalised state of mind in which a man, benevolently inclined, believes in a supreme being, and is in a general way disposed to have some regard to questions of right or wrong. Such a man need not have very definite ideas about God; he need not have any theory of futurity or of duty; he need not be encumbered with any ardent convictions on such topics one way or other. He need not even be sure about a supreme being. Provided he is kindly and honest, interested in “goodness,” and prepared to be charitable in the sense of allowing that all men may be in the right, and that nothing is particularly wrong, he is a godly man according to the attenuated sense of the term as now current.

Fortunately we are under no need to seek our cue from modern traditions on the subject. God has given us His idea of godliness in a way we cannot mistake. He has given it to us in the best of all ways; in a variety of long exemplifications. We may see it first in the two dispensations of His will that have been most prominently displayed before men. We have a New Testament and an Old Testament; a first covenant and a second. We look at these two systems as they are in themselves—as they are displayed to us in the Scriptures (and not as they are conceived by moderns, whether teachers or taught). They are both divine, and the only divine systems of godliness ever extant upon earth. And what do we find? That God is on their forefront with a brightness almost blinding. They are not systems of morality—systems of “goodness” as understood in our day; not systems of human behaviour, but systems of divine worship and service. They are not concerned with philosophy or science or learning—terms that after all only define the partial and very small way in which limited aspects of eternal truth impress the shallow mind of man. They go to the root of the matter: they bring God before us—God Himself—God, the Creator, God, the Father; God the eternal and archetypal personal intelligence of whom the physical universe is but the expression in His attributes of power and wisdom. Take God from these systems, and scarcely anything would be left. The precepts for human behaviour are but the minor rays of the sun that blazes upon us in these revelations. The nature of both (which are yet one, for the second is a development from, and the complement of, the first) is condensed into that grand opening sentence of the Hebrews:

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.”

God speaking, and speaking for the glory of His Name; this is the characteristic of the old and new covenants. This is manifest at a glance.

We speak of “the Mosaic economy”; but we speak not quite accurately when we speak thus. The Mosaic element was but an instrumentality—a poor, trembling

instrumentality in the case. Moses left to himself would never have troubled Israel or the world with the law that bears his name. He was contented with the quiet life of a shepherd in Midian. God appeared to him; God sent him on an errand which was opposed to his inclinations. God sent him to Pharaoh to demand the liberation of His people. God wrought wonders in Egypt to enforce this deliverance. God brought them out by Moses. God opened the Red Sea for them; God led them into the wilderness. God manifested Himself to the whole nation at Sinai; God gave them a law from thence; and the very first clause in the first enunciation of that law was the declaration of His God-head and the demands of Israel's worship. God gave them a constitution; and the central idea of that constitution was God; God in their midst in the tabernacle of testimony; God to be approached in sacrifice on the morning and evening of every day; God to be continually remembered in the private intercourse of families, in the writing of the law on the door posts, and in the presentation of offerings in connection with almost every incident of domestic life; God to be honoured in periodical public festivals—to be brought to mind in the Passover, to be thanked in the offering of first fruits, to be praised in the feast of tabernacles—and to be feared and worshipped on the great day of atonement. Every public and private institute of the Mosaic system was designed to bring God before the mind of Israel, and Israel into the attitude of fear and worship.

And how is it with the new covenant? Is the image of God any less distinct in the teaching of Christ? Is it not rather more visible, and more full, and more forward, if that be possible? It invites men to a closer relation to God than the law established—“*no more a servant, but a son.*” This is a change that develops God more distinctly to those who are the subjects of it. It is the feature visible in the entire system. Christ himself comes to us as the manifestation of the Father for purposes of reconciliation.

“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.”

“We pray you,” says Paul, “be ye **reconciled to God.**” To those accepting the reconciliation, the proposal is made,

“I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters.”

Those so received—all who believed and obeyed the gospel—are said to “*have fellowship with the Father*”; are “*now the sons of God,*” whose appointed part it is to be “*followers of God as dear children,*” and who, symbolically, are said to have the “*Father's name written in their foreheads.*” They are in friendship with God—a mighty distinction though “*it doth not yet appear*” what it involves.

This is a very different system from the poor morality to which popular tradition has reduced so-called “Christianity.” It is a system of **godliness** as distinct from what may be considered as **manliness**. Popular Christianity is an affair of man's behaviour to man: the genuine thing, while it includes man's behaviour to man, is more a matter of man's behaviour to God. Does a man know God? Does he love Him? Does he obey Him? Does he serve Him? These are the questions that determine a man's relation to godliness of the only true sort. The man of whom “Yes” can be said in answer to these questions, is the man that is godly, and God

“hath chosen him that is godly for himself.”

God has given us examples of the man that is godly. There are many of them in the Scriptures. If we desire to be in the category, let us study them and conform to them. Glance this morning at leading specimens. There are Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and last and greatest of all, the Lord Jesus. These are all “*men that are godly*” after the divine pattern;

and **there is no other true pattern**. What is their leading characteristic? Is it not this—their concern for the will of God? their recognition of God, their love of God, their zeal for Him? Abel pleased God by his faithful rendering of what was required. Cain brought the fruits of the field. We cannot please God by our own contrivances. We must do as He appoints. In this matter, we must heed well the admonition,

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.”

Our day is a day of men leaning to their own understanding. You cannot listen to a sermon or popular lecture on religious subjects without being made to feel that men have practically repudiated the obligation to submit to divine appointments, and rest wholly on their own conceptions of what is right, and true. This is ungodliness without people perhaps knowing it. There is no greater ungodliness than non-compliance with what God has required. This was the sin of Adam that brought death into the world: it was the sin of Nadab and Abihu, Aaron’s sons, who were told to kindle their censers from the fire burning on the altar, but who thought any fire would do, and paid with their lives on the spot for their careless dealing in divine matters. It will be found to be the great crime of this generation when the Lord comes to administer Jehovah’s vengeance. The offensiveness of the truth to our contemporaries lies chiefly in its insistence on what God has appointed. We are despised of our neighbours because we maintain that except a man believe the gospel preached by the apostles, and submit to baptism, and continue in the observance of all things that the Lord has appointed, he cannot be saved. We have no choice in the matter. We do not like the scorn, but we must accept it if we can only escape it by joining in the universal rejection of the divine appointments.

Take Noah as a specimen of a godly man. What did his godliness chiefly consist of? His belief in God and what God said, and his obedience of the commandments delivered to him.

“Moved with fear, he prepared an ark to the saving of his house,” so Paul says (Heb. 11:7), and by this, he adds, *“he (Noah) condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.”*

His action condemned the world: it was a foolish action to build a ship on dry land, but it was done at the divine command, and with an object in view—to escape the coming flood. Had he not believed in the coming flood, he would not have built the ark; but believing it he did, and therefore silently condemned the world in what he did. So it is with the gospel now: we do things that are foolish in themselves; we do them because God has commanded them, and for a reason—because we believe in the testified coming judgment and salvation: and our actions silently condemn the world, and therefore the world hates us. Do we not also, like Noah, become *“heirs of the righteousness which is by faith”*? The world does not believe in this species of righteousness. In a word, it does not believe in godliness. It believes in manliness: it believes in keeping your hand out of your neighbour’s pocket, but as for pleasing God by having faith in His word, it is an entire stranger to this idea. Lamentable aberration! The storm will rectify the atmosphere.

Abraham—how appears he as a godly man? Not so much as a man of neighbourly urbanities, though he was all that, as every godly man is in the truest form. It is more as the God-fearing, God-obeying man that Abraham is portrayed. The word of God finds him among his kindred and commands him to leave them:

“Get thee out of thy country and from thy father’s house, into a land that I will show thee.”

By faith, Abraham obeys this command, breaks up his home, and departs to a strange country, not knowing whither he goes. In the land of his pilgrimage, we find him building altars and worshipping God, who appears to him. Jehovah commands him,

“Walk before me and be thou perfect.”

“I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.”

God makes great and precious promises to him, and

“Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.”

God is in Abraham’s godliness, first and last. He knows God, loves God, believes God. Further, he obeys Him under the severest test. God orders the sacrifice of Isaac, in whom he had said Abraham’s seed should be called. If ever there was reason for hesitation, it was in such a case when obedience seemed to stultify God’s own words; but Abraham hesitated not a moment, but in obedient docility proceeded to comply with the divine direction. And Jesus says, we are Abraham’s seed if we do the works of Abraham.

Moses stands conspicuous for the place he gave to God in his regard, his fears, and his compliances. Paul tells us he was *“faithful to him that appointed him.”* David also, *“the man after God’s own heart,”* was like him, in placing God always before his face, and yearning towards Him with supreme desire, and trembling at His word and appointments. And who can think of Jesus without realizing in him the completest concentration of this living sense of the living God of Israel, his Father, whose exhibition he was to the House of Israel.

“The man that is godly” is illustrated in all these instances. Let us accept them and ponder them, and imitate them. Let us disown the diluted and impoverished godliness of this present age. It is a godliness that has no God in it. You may find professors of it who have doubts as to the personal God of Israel. They will tell you they believe in a Supreme Being, but as to the personality of God, they are not sure of that. Not sure of the personality of God? What do they think God is? Is He a gas, a force, an energy, a principle working out a mechanical wisdom, without intelligence, without consciousness, without personality? If He had not revealed Himself, we might be in doubt; but he has revealed Himself, and there is no doubt. The God of Israel is the creator of heaven and earth, and He is a personal God, the source of the Universal Power—having invisible extension in Immensity, and yet dwelling in bright and living glory at the heart-centre of His mighty Dominion. This God of Israel is the Father of our Lord Jesus, and the recognition of Him and faith in him is the heart of all zeal for Him, and the first essence of true godliness. Though in the highest heaven, He is not far from every one of us, for in the mystery of universal simultaneous extension, which some phenomena of modern science have enabled us to receive as a fact, He fills heaven and earth, and we are in Him and subsist in Him, and are openly manifest to Him in the inmost intents of the heart. The man who realizes this has great power in the present walk through darkness. Nothing can overthrow him. His hand is clasped in God’s; his faith in Him is the unbounded confidence of a child in its father, but on a higher, and stronger, and more invincible basis. He knows that all things are of God; that no man has property in himself; that the programme is in God’s direction; and he feels as a reasonable sentiment, what Job put into words when he said,

“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”

All things work together for good to them who are called according to His purpose. Even the wicked are His sword, and evil the scourge with which, sometimes for their good, he chastises His own.

Who shall say the lesson is too hard? If any be so disposed, let them remember the lesson is no human invention. It is God's own lesson. Christ is the copy set. Shall we alter the copy to suit the capacities of the last arrived ragamuffin from the streets? This would be folly to be bitterly repented on the day when all things on the earth will be conformed to the divine standard, and when "*holiness to the Lord*" shall be inscribed on even the bells of the horses in Jerusalem.

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