

REGARDING GOD, AND HIS WORKS

We all know that life in the Truth is a battle. I do not mean a battle with errors in others, but with unbelief in ourselves; by unbelief I do not mean an unbelief that we would affirm or own to, but the latent unbelief that belongs by nature to the unenlightened human brain on every subject—the passive feeling that belongs to ignorance. We are all ignorant at the start—ignorant of everything. Knowledge comes slowly from without. It has to be “*sought for*” as the Scriptures represent: and when found, it won’t stay unless we take means to retain it. Human memory is weak, and soon forgets, —especially with regard to the class of things that constitute the Truth. They are all things “*not seen,*” whether past, present or future; and some of them are things for which we have not much natural liking and therefore forgetfulness and consequent unbelief becomes very easy, unless we are on our guard. We have constantly to remind ourselves that the truth of a thing does not depend upon our seeing it—whether past, present or future. Have we seen the ancient Britons? Have we seen the Czar of Russia? Have we seen the men of the next generation? Yet who doubts the reality of these “*things not seen?*”

There are different kinds of “*things not seen*”—different kinds of truth—some unimportant—some important. It is with the latter we have to do. It is the latter we desire to bring to mind. It is the latter which will enable us to overcome the mere bias of native ignorance, and walk as children of light.

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

This faith lays hold of things—is persuaded of things that we cannot see, but which are true. It does so by means God has given us for the purpose. We need to avail ourselves of these means in the amplest measure, or faith is liable to wither and die. We need strengthening in the fight or we may be overcome instead of overcoming.

The meetings are for this purpose. The meetings bring the readings and the readings bring the things, the conviction of which imparts the power that overcomes. How directly, how powerfully is this result produced sometimes. Take our case this morning. Here we have had a reading to us from a letter of the apostle Paul’s. The letter is actually in our hands—a visible actual matter of fact—this very living day. It has been a matter of fact during a long yesterday of 1,800 years. It has been in men’s hands all that time. Of this there is no manner of question. Thus we stand in a mental sense on an unbroken line that goes right away back from where we stand in Birmingham in 1893 to the time and place where Paul was a living breathing man, writing to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 4). With that come mighty conclusions, and another line that takes us right away back to David and to the Psalms we have read (Psalms 110, 111 and 112).

For, what do we find Paul saying? That he is “*troubled,*” “*perplexed,*” “*persecuted,*” “*cast down*” (v. 8-9). We ask why is he in this state? Because of the course he is pursuing in preaching Christ, “*wherein,*” he says—

“I suffer trouble as an evil doer even unto bonds”
(2 Tim. 2:9).

The trouble is so keen that he says—

“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”

Why doesn’t he stop the preaching that is bringing such unwelcome consequences? He tells us in the chapter read—v.13, —

“We believe and therefore speak.”

Paul then, is convinced of the truth of what he declares. What is it that he declares? That—

“Christ is risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor. 15:20).

And now, Paul, why do you believe this? His answer in brief is this: On the testimony of many witnesses and on the evidence of my own senses. He refers to the testimony of the witnesses thus:

“He was seen many days (after his crucifixion, that is) of them that came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses to the people” (Acts 13:31) and again thus:

“He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve, after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that he was seen of James, then of all the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:5-7).

To the evidence of his own senses he thus refers:

“He was seen of me also” (v. 8).

“Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?” (1 Cor. 9:1).

“At midday, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun . . . I could not see for the glory of the light” (Acts 26:13; 22:11).

It was, therefore, not without very good reasons that Paul persevered in the course that led to the troubled, perplexed, persecuted, cast down state described in this chapter. It was a case of seeing with the eyes and handling with the hands on the part of many righteous witnesses. On such an impregnable foundation as this does the faith of Christ’s resurrection stand. And now if Christ rose, see where conclusions ramify; Christ quotes this 110th Psalm which we have read this morning, and says—

“David by the Spirit saith.”

Further than that, he says, David by the Spirit saith thus and so concerning *“Christ.”* Thus we have Christ for a “commentator” on the 110th Psalm, establishing a few things greatly called in question in our day. He vanquishes higher criticism in saying *“David saith”* where higher criticism says, David saith not, but somebody else later than David saith. He sweeps away the “human element” school, who number millions, and who say the Psalms of David are the offspring of David’s genius, and not the work of inspiration; and he settles the quibble of poor Israel after the flesh by which they seek to divert this Psalm from the Messiah, and make it the complimentary effusion of some court poet in honour of David. Who would not prefer the verdict of the resurrected Son of God who “knew what was in man” to the opinion, however unanimous (which it is not) of a whole host of so-called learned men of our far-off age, who know nothing about the matter personally, but grope about among musty manuscripts and mander over obscure and open questions of composition and style, and come to conclusions which are mere suggestions and probabilities, but which the common world, eager to disbelieve, snatches up and runs off with in triumph as matters of demonstration? Even Mr. Gladstone says to them, “Wait.” But, oh no, it is quite too sweet an affair to have the authority of “learning” for discarding the authority of the Bible. They cannot afford to wait. They pass the learned guesses triumphantly round as so many truths unquestionable, and pity the simple souls that hold on by Christ. But we will hold on by him. The babble and the dust alter nothing. Christ is the Truth.

We follow Christ to these 3 Psalms and dwell on them for a few moments. They each seem to have a central idea. The first, Christ; the second, God; the third, the saints. All these belong to us and are germane to the purpose for which we meet around this Table. On the first of the three, we need not linger, having so recently had to look thoroughly into it. On Christ’s authority, we are close to Christ in it. He sits at the Father’s right hand till the rod of his strength is sent forth *“out of Zion.”* This has not occurred yet. His presence in Zion 1,800 years ago was in weakness and dishonour;

“He came to his own but his own received him not;”

He was oppressed and afflicted, despised and rejected, and slain. The cry prevailed,

“We will not have this man to reign over us.”

God removed him from the scene for a season; and Zion has become a scorn in the earth—both as to hill, land, and people. Jerusalem sits in the dust. She has sunk to the position of a mere archaeological curiosity—a place of mild interest to be visited by tourists. Oh, what a change shortly! When the rod of Messiah’s strength goes out of Zion, the world will tremble, and *“many nations shall go and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh”*—not to gratify a tourist curiosity but to learn the Law of God in fear and trembling—to worship.

“He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths; out of Zion shall go forth a law”—the rod of strength—a rod of iron.

It will affect things and governments and people in a very peremptory manner.

“Yahweh at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of His wrath.”

There will be short work with the demurring human beings in any quantity.

“He shall fill the places with dead bodies.”

“They shall go into the holes of the rocks and into the caves of the earth for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth”

(Isa. 2:19).

God *“will bring distress upon men that they shall walk like blind men because they have sinned against Yahweh; and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung; neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of Yahweh’s wrath”* (Zeph. 1:17).

As for Christ and his people, it will be a day of the lifting up of the head:

“He shall drink of the brook by the way; therefore shall he lift up the head.”

Whether we take this drinking of the brook as a figure of the sufferings of this present time, or of the taking in of God’s strength in the sense of Micah 5:4 (*“He shall stand and feed in the strength of Yahweh in the majesty of the name of Yahweh his God”*), the lifting up of the head is the same. Hanging down the head is the order of the day just now with everything connected with Christ; it is the day of probation, the day of suffering—so much so that we are liable to have a feeling that it will never be anything else. Cast this feeling away as an utter illusion.

“Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart.”

Lifting up of the head awaits Christ in head and body. Nothing but joy and honour and gladness is contemplated in all God’s dispensations to His people.

“Weeping may endure for a night (and that night is necessarily a short one to every individual saint) but joy cometh in the morning.”

The morning when it comes is the morning of a cloudless and everlasting day.

The second of the three Psalms places God before us. He can be placed before us in many ways. In this it is an object of admiration and search.

“The works of the Lord are great, and sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.”

Suppose we are not in this category; suppose we are insensible to the wisdom and greatness and glory of the works of God, and have no proneness to the searching of them and find no pleasure in them, what then? Is it a matter of indifference to God whether we care for Him or not? On the contrary, another Psalm speaks thus plainly:

“Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of His hand, He shall destroy them and not build them up.”

Here is a point calling for the closest attention. It is not the characteristic of our generation to care for the works of God at all. The whole universe is made in wisdom—the adaptation of means to ends in the superbest manner; and yet most men are mere triflers—caring only for sensationalism or folly, having no taste to study and discern and admire the wisdom of the

works of God at all. If this is the case with regard to nature, how much more is it so with regards to God's procedure towards man through Christ, which is the highest form of His wisdom in relation to us as individuals. For this, almost all men have an absolute disrelish. The day is dark. Night reigns: what then? Shall we give in to the universal infatuation, and become fools like the multitude? Paul did not; why should we? He said—

"We are not of the night nor of darkness: we are all the children of the light and of the day. Walk as children of the light."

The night will soon be past. When the day fills the world with joy and light, and those are rejoicing there who have overcome in the dark struggle of the night that now prevails, it will be practically manifest to every man how true is the concluding statement of this Psalm:

"The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do His commandments."

The third of the Psalms (that is, Psa. 112) has something to say concerning this class, which is very much in agreement with all that we read in the apostolic writings concerning the saints—both as regards present characteristics and future results:

"Blessed is the man that feareth Yahweh and delighteth greatly in His commandments."

Fear and delight may seem an incongruous combination. It is natural, chaste and beautiful in the class described. How precious is the man or woman so characterised. In the wilderness of human life as it now is it is pleasant to meet with those who are a little interested in the ways of God—who mildly delight in them, but think of the man who "*greatly delights*" in them! He is a treasure to God and man. He is blessed in himself now and in the future that waits him: for God to whom all things belong intends to bestow everything at last on those who fear Him and delight greatly in His commandments. "*Wealth and riches,*" as the Psalm says, "*shall be in his house;*" "*surely he shall not be moved for ever.*" Darkness now may be his lot, but "*unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness.*"

"He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in Yahweh."

And now consider what such a man is towards others. For here is the glory of true godliness, that he not only fears God, but shows kindness to man. An unkind man fearing God would not be acceptable to God:

"A good man showeth favour and lendeth."

"He is gracious and full of compassion and righteous . . . He hath dispersed: he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever."

We need to ponder this. It is exactly what Christ commands. The stream is all against our conforming to this standard. Everything within us and around us will paralyse our hand unless we look to God in the matter. We will say with the world, "he does not deserve it." We will say with the world, "There are so many of them, it is no use." We will say with the world, "It will pauperise me to give them." A wise man—the man who truly fears God will not be swayed by these maxims. He will say, "I practise kindness, not because the people around me deserve it, but because He has commanded it who say,

'Be kind to the unthankful and to the evil.'

I give when I can, not because I hope to heal the world's woes by philanthropy; but because God requires it, and you ask me if it is any use. I say 'No, not as regards the world, but I consider it of great use to please God.'" This is the right way to work—with God in view, resolved to fulfil the part He requires, whatever the present consequences, or want of consequences. This is the only practicable course. The world is such a morass of woe that you will never do anything when once you get a full view of its hopelessness, if you trust to your feelings or to human wisdom. A man can do anything God commands when once he is sure He commands it. This is the secret of the exhortation:

"Trust in Yahweh and do good;"

Do your part towards Him; never mind the big impracticable that lies before you.

“Trust in Yahweh with all thy heart and lean not unto thine own understanding.”

He says—

“Do good unto all men as you have opportunity.”

This is why we are to do it because He requires it, not because we are going to save the world by it, for that is impossible. It is a good, sound working rule that will keep a man in well-doing all his vain life, and that will glorify his memory in death—for God and man. It looks well when a man gets through—when we see him in his coffin, cold and quiet and at peace—life’s fever past. It wreathes a holy memory round his head when we are able to say, “Well, poor fellow, he had an uphill fight, but he always strove to govern his actions by the will of God. He did a good turn to as many as he could. He loved not in word only, but in deed and truth.” How differently we feel when the dead form of a man who did well for himself, kept his own skin whole, but left his unfortunate neighbour to shift for himself.

Take the case one further step forward. Take it to the day when God shall judge the righteous and the wicked. Of the poor and righteous man, the Psalm says,

“His horn shall be exalted with honour. The wicked shall see it and be grieved. He shall gnash with his teeth and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish.”

When we fully and clearly see these things, we can heartily say with Paul in the reading from 2 Corinthians:

“For which cause we faint not: but though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: while we look not at the things which are seen but the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

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By Bro. Robert Roberts