

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 15

1 Timothy 1. —We are happy, brethren and sisters, in being included, though at a late period of the world's history, in the operations of the man who wrote the letter in which this chapter appears. Those operations are the only permanently important operations in progress among men. Paul describes himself as "*an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" We know that his work as an apostle was to go to the Gentiles, and open their blind eyes, that they might have inheritance among them who are sanctified through the faith that is in Christ; and we know that the work had no limitation as to locality, for he was to go everywhere preaching the word; and no limitation as to time, for he was busy a whole forty years; he preached at the beginning of the forty years and at the end of them; and if forty years made no difference as to the efficacy of his apostleship, eighteen hundred years make no difference; for Christ has not withdrawn the message communicated through him to the Gentiles.

Therefore, although we have not heard Paul, we have the happiness of knowing that we are as really in the meshes of the gospel net that he threw into the sea, as if we had been actually enclosed by the fisherman's hand. This is a very consoling fact. Nevertheless, there are qualifications in the consolation; for Paul says that his teaching, while to some a savour of life unto life, was unto others, a savour of death unto death; and, therefore, if we are more privileged than our Gentile neighbours who remain in darkness, we, at the same time, are under a responsibility they know nothing of. A man that has no understanding is like the beasts that perish; going to the generation of his fathers, he shall never see the light.

"The man that wanders out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead."— (Prov. 21:16.)

But that is not our position, even if we fail to lay hold of the high calling to which we have been called. It is not our alternative to remain amongst the beasts that perish, and pass away without resurrection. The very contrary is the case. There remaineth a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation for those who are disobedient, who, exalted to the privileged relation of adopted children, walk unworthily of that position. Therefore, while there is comfort in the fact that we are included in the pale of apostolic operations, there is an aspect of the case that is pregnant with warning. Our way is hedged. While there is glory on one hand, inspiring unspeakable hope and joy, there is, on the other, much that is calculated to make us sober, and to induce us to take the matter seriously, and give diligent heed lest we fail of this grace of God, and come short of the great salvation which is in Jesus Christ. Our duty is—our most earnest business ought to be—to find out what is this calling to which we are called, and what is the position we occupy in relation to it: so that it may be to us a savour of life unto life, instead of proving an aggravation of our naturally outcast condition.

Well, Paul, in a few words in the first chapter that has been read, defines the nature and object and essence of the commandment which was entrusted to him by the Lord; and it will enlighten and strengthen us a little, to realise what he says. He says in the fifth verse,

"Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned."

To guide us in the comprehension of his meaning, he refers to circumstances that elicited this expression from him. He in a word lets us see exactly what he is driving at.

"From which some having swerved, have turned aside unto vain jangling."

The "*some*" referred to here, we shall find were professedly brethren. They were not such as had turned away from the truth. They were not those who took the position of blasphemers. "*They desired to be teachers of the Law;*" therefore, they were religious people, people who handled divine things, but who "*understood neither what they said nor whereof they affirmed.*" This was a class that once were in the right faith, because he says they had "*turned aside.*"

An important matter to consider, is the nature of their turning away, and the nature of the things from which they did turn away. He says they turned aside to "*vain jangling.*" They did not become blasphemers, or immoral persons, or unbelievers; but, leaving their "*first-love,*" they became crotchety; they began to agitate and argue unskilfully, about things that were purely subordinate and collateral. They desired to be teachers of the law. Well, the law is a thing that requires to be unfolded

in teaching. We see this in the epistle of Paul to the Hebrews, where he says that it—the law—was a “*shadow of good things to come.*” Prima facie, therefore, it is a good thing to “teach the law.” Here, then, were men desiring to do an ostensibly good thing. They desired to teach the law, under the plea, no doubt, of edifying and building-up their brethren. But Paul says they turned aside unto vain jangling; they turned from “*the end of the commandment*”—the very object, and aim, and spirit of the gospel—to what Paul elsewhere characterises as a strife about words, to no profit, but to the subversion of their hearers. In opposition to this, he exhorts Timothy to continue in sound doctrine, and to speak the things that are true of Jesus Christ; in doing which, he says,

“Thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.”

Here, then, is an important lesson: that men need to be taken up with the milk of the word, the primitive truth, the substantial faith in the simplicity that is in Christ. The truth concerning Christ is simple and perfectly glorious. He is offered unto men for justification unto eternal life, on condition of faith in the good that God has testified of him—that he was the son of God, brought into the world to take away sin, God laying upon him the iniquities of us all; that he was raised from the dead, and having immortality conferred upon him, has become the High Priest of his own house, to make intercession for their sins, according to the will of God; that in course of time he will return again, to set his own house in order, to sit in the high places of the earth, and to give his people honour, glory, and immortality in the kingdom which he will establish.

These are the simple, easily-comprehended, and delightful tidings, good news, or gospel, concerning Christ preached for the salvation of the Gentiles. Any system of teaching that runs away from the real thing, or that has a tendency to distract attention from or lessen the importance of “*first principles,*” is but vain jangling, and which brings no nourishment, or cheer, or good, but blights the spiritual man. Milk, not vinegar; beef, not pickles, is the demand of a healthy appetite. Vain jangling is like whiskey toddy; exhilarating to those who have no better way of spending their time, but destructive to the constitution. We have seen illustrations of vain jangling in our own time—men taken up with crotchets which they have magnified into importance; starting discussions which have no practical bearing whatever, and upon which even no certain judgment can be arrived at. Such a policy is ruinous in relation to the truth. The atmosphere created by vain jangling is highly unfavourable to spiritual health. The atmosphere, and those who create it, ought carefully to be avoided. There is only one sensible and healthy course. Considering the important business that we are engaged in—the business of being saved—considering the difficult object we are striving to accomplish—the difficulty of laying aside every weight, and the sin that doth most easily beset us, and running with patience the race that is set before us—the difficulty of purifying ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and conforming to the will of the Father in all things—I say, considering the importance and the difficulty of the great task that all have in hand, who have named the name of Christ, how exceedingly unwise and dangerous are these vain janglings in which people exercise themselves about things which they cannot understand, and which even understood, have little to do with the purpose we have in hand.

Next, we have to consider the thing from which these vain janglers turned aside; and here we shall get a glimpse of the thing which we are to hold on to with all our might. “*The end of the commandment*—(the object of the whole matter)—*is charity out of a pure heart and a good conscience and of faith unfeigned;*” not charity out of a good conscience and of faith unfeigned, but a good conscience and faith. Unfeigned charity, out of a pure heart, is one thing; a good conscience is another; and the third, faith unfeigned. These are three things, each definite enough in nature, recognisable in manifestation, scarce in attainment, yet essential to make a believer accepted. Let us look at them, and realise what they are. Charity we must all know and possess. All other acquisitions are useless without it. This is Paul’s statement about it:

“Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing; though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.”

How important must a moral attainment be of which Paul could say this; and, not to leave us in the dark, he defines what it is; or rather, he illustrates the manner of its manifestation, and that is going a long way in telling what it is.

“Charity suffereth long and is kind, charity seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh not evil, is not puffed up, rejoiceth not in iniquity” (or the things pertaining to it) “but rejoiceth in the truth.”

Now, these are all qualities easy to be understood. Doesn't anyone know what it is to suffer long? Not to be easily provoked? Not to jump to hot conclusions? Not to be rash? Not to behave in an unseemly manner? Yes; everybody understands these beautiful traits of character with the others mentioned. Observe, the lesson, then, that unless we exhibit these fruits of the spirit, our belief will go for nothing. Besides believing the gospel and understanding mysteries, then, let us see to it that we are long-suffering in our relations to men. Let us never resent injuries, nor return evil for evil; be not overcome of evil. Be kind; charity is kind. If we are not kind, we have no part nor lot in this matter; a selfish individual will not enter into the kingdom of God. We must look not every man on his own things, but also on the things of other. Consider others; serve others. Be like Christ, of whom it is testified that he came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. Kindness consists in doing things that are for the well-being, convenience, and comfort of others; and it is part of the duty of those who are Christ's, to distinguish themselves in this way.

If, having a knowledge of the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Christ, we are still outside these acts of kindness, our knowledge is but an inert principle, which will not save us. Faith without works is dead. The kingdom of God will be the administration of the law of kindness; the things concerning the name of Jesus Christ are but the doctrinal development of divine kindness. The truth is, therefore, a system of kindness; and what has that person to do with it who is not himself kind? We are not to judge. But every man who has not the spirit of Christ, is none of his. Therefore a true Christadelphian—a true brother of Christ, is not one who merely holds the truth theoretically—who takes hold of Christadelphian-ism in opposition to other religions; but is a man of benevolence begotten of the truth—a man who does good to others; a man who serves not himself, but is in this a true follower of Christ, who served not himself. Christ came to lay down his life for many; and he tells us that a disciple is not above his master; that we must be content to be in the same condition with him; that if needs be, we must lay down our lives for Christ's sake; and if our lives are to be at his command, certainly our time and our purse and our strength are not exempt.

Christ demands unreserved fidelity. He is exacting; he will not accept partial discipleship.

“If any man come after me, and hate not father and mother, and husband and wife, and houses and land, he cannot be my disciple.”

Hard words, perhaps, and distasteful to half-hearted believers, but true; and to those who have given themselves to the Lord with full purpose of heart—glorious. It has before now happened that disciples have said—

“This is a hard saying: who can hear it?”

If this happened in his presence, much more is it likely to happen in his absence. Let us beware, brethren—listen to his voice!

“If any man will follow me, let him take up his cross daily.”

It is not for those who are Christ's to look for their good things now; they must be as Christ was.

“Woe unto you that are rich now, and laugh now, and are comfortable now: the days are coming when your consolation shall cease; when your laughter shall be turned unto bitterness and mourning; but blessed are ye that take part in Christ's suffering now; for your mourning shall be turned into joy. He that saveth himself now shall be lost.”

Therefore think of the folly of the individual who, coming to the truth, begins to wonder what effect it will have on his temporal surroundings. The person who harbours temporal considerations at such a crisis, is not worthy of the truth. A young man came to Christ, and Christ asked him to come and follow him; but the young man said—

“Let me first go and bury my father.”

Christ replied—

“Let the dead bury their dead.”

Another came and said,

“Let me go and bid good-bye to my father and mother;” and Jesus answered,
“No man having put his hand to the plough, and turneth back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Hard words but God's words, in the way of which alone is life and everlasting joy.

If we are not charitable in the true sense, we may come every Sunday to the table, and attend every meeting that is held for the truth's sake, and yet Christ will come and say—

"I know you not; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity."

We, therefore, must measure our calling and position by the standard of the word, and not by the unreliable opinion of mortal man, brother or no brother. Charity out of a pure heart is the very object of the gospel. The gospel is but the means appointed for the purification for Christ of a peculiar people, zealous of good works. How lamentable is the spectacle, therefore, of persons holding the truth, and yet uninfluenced by it in their conduct. Beware, lest we hold the truth of God in unrighteousness. Better we had never known it than such be the case. Purity of heart must be the source of rectitude of conduct. The fruits of the spirit cannot emanate from carnal-minded, unkind people.

Jesus says we may know what kind of a heart a man has by what he does. A man may wish to be considered doing the right thing when he is not; but **he** cannot long hide himself. He may deceive people for a time; but only give him time enough, and he will show himself in his true colours. Do not judge a man by a single act; it is very dangerous to do so, either for good or bad. Give him say twenty chances, and he will show himself. A corrupt man will show himself corrupt in the long run. Under excitement, he may do a good thing. Among the right kind of people he will appear genuine. During a meeting, a person may feel very good, and approve the things that are excellent; but the real trial is when there is no excitement—in the rough and tumble of everyday life: that is the time when the real man comes out. If you cannot discover the brother or sister of Christ there, it is no use trying to find them. A person who is a brother of Christ at the meeting of the ecclesia, but not in the wicked surroundings of the week, is a mere hypocrite. He is deceiving himself.

A pure heart is the first condition of spiritual fruitfulness. We must strive to get this. We can get at it in only one way. By nature we are the children of impurity. Our brains have nothing in them by nature, except what we know as natural brute beasts; and if we trust to our brains alone, we shall go wrong. It is God's word that puts us right; this will purify the heart. If we let it blow through continually, it will deodorise the corruptions of the natural mind. Faith in what God has said will keep us straight; but the memory of what He has said, must be kept constantly bright, or faith cannot act. Knowledge is the foundation, and this too must grow. If we trust to the little stock we may have, we shall fall short. Never trust a single day to yesterday's supply. The substance of our whole being is continually on the move. The food we take today is used up in the activities of today. This is true physically and mentally, carnally and spiritually; therefore we must keep up the supply, if we wish to preserve our power, and escape running to nothing.

There be many things acting upon us without our effort or attention. Our eyes are open, and there is a constant stream of mental impression running in through this avenue—impressions linking us with time and sense. We see things that **are**; and as the things that are do not interpret themselves, we are liable to be deceived by them. The things that are, **are not** in reality, when we judge by results. They do not continue; they are drifting downward, carrying all men into oblivion; but for the moment, they seem to say as we look, **WE ARE**. Thus there is a stream of falsehood reaching the mind continually through the eyes; and so with regard to the ear, and all our other senses. They deceive the mind ignorant of the purposes of God.

Now, in the Bible, we have a still small voice speaking from the long distant past; and telling us that the real thing is coming by and bye; and that we must sacrifice the present for the future—the unreal for the real. If we put our ears close, we hear the voice; but we are in danger of not hearing. The lies lift their voice in clamour; whereas this lies quiet; and if we do not step aside, and as it were try to catch the echoes of this heavenly voice, we shall never hear. We can only get at wisdom by going out of the way of it. For this reason the majority of people will not be saved. They will be seduced by the things around them. Our only safety is to make it our business to read the Bible regularly and systematically. If you don't do it systematically, you won't do it at all. The man who trusts to furtive reading will find himself lacking in the end. The man who does not feed his spiritual nature, daily, will fail to gain spiritual strength. If a man starve ten days, and then fill himself to the bursting, he is not likely to grow in strength. Spasmodic modes of life are dangerous, and so the man who goes without spiritual food a long time, and then dives deeply into spiritual things, will not grow healthily.

There is only one way of doing the work thoroughly: read every day a little. Never deceive yourself with the idea that you have no time. Everybody has a little time at his disposal, and everybody finds time for what he considers of first importance. In this matter it only wants the endeavour, and the endeavour will come when there is a due sense of the situation. A man who is drowning is desperate, and will clutch at anything to save himself, and so it will be with us, if we apprehend our whereabouts. We are naturally sinking, sinking, sinking, and if we do not lay hold of that which alone can save us, we shall disappear for ever from sight. Therefore, it comes to this that if we would be saved in these times when there is no living exposition of the divine mind, we must set ourselves to this work of reading the Bible; and we must attend to it in a systematic manner; something after the system laid down in *The Bible Companion*.

I know it is not everyone that can read the Bible with the same profit; but I also know that those who are spiritually minded, are so from this practice of continually reading the Scriptures; and that if the best of us were to give that reading up, we should speedily drift back into a spiritually destitute condition. It is true the results of Bible reading will differ according to natural capacity, but this general law is applicable to all—that those who read, will be those who know and feel the truth.

Two other things mentioned in the chapter before us, as the end and object of the commandment, are a good conscience and faith unfeigned. What is a good conscience? That state of mind which causes a man to do things that are right because they are right, and not because they are pleasurable in themselves. Right things are sometimes pleasurable, but they are by no means always so. The difference between the man of good conscience and the man of indifferent conscience, is that the former does right, sunshine or rain, pleasure or pain; while the latter does right when it happens to be agreeable, and swerves to the wrong if the right interferes with his interests. The accepted will be of the former class alone.

None will enter the kingdom of God but those who carry about with them a thorough love of righteousness, and put their love so far into practice, that they will not allow themselves to be drawn into wrong doing, even if it is to save their lives. Many people do right so long as there is no detriment from that course; but the moment it works against their interests, they do not scruple to do a little wrong, and sometimes even a great wrong. This is fatal to spiritual prospects.

“Unless your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of God.”

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

“Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.”

Therefore let us all observe this exhortation carefully. If we neglect it, we are in danger of losing ourselves, and preventing the salvation of others. Our actions tend to scare away people from the truth, if they see them mixed up with unrighteousness. We ought to be scrupulously honourable—men and women of good faith, whose word is sacred; who consider a promise binding, even if fulfilment is detrimental. That is what David says a man of God is—one who swears to his own hurt and changeth not. In all our dealings let us remember this.

Then, there is faith unfeigned. There is a difference between real faith and sham faith. Faith is the conviction or belief of what God has promised; faith is the substance (in the mind) of things hoped for; and if our profession of faith is real, our faith will influence all other thoughts and actions. If, while we profess to believe that God has made certain promises: that Jesus did rise from the dead, and that he will come again: and all the while act as the world around us acts, we have only got feigned faith, not real faith; it is not a faith that worketh by love. Real faith is a treasure, a companion of delight, a spring of living water, a fountain of purity. Those who shall enter into the kingdom of God are men of unfeigned faith, which enables them to do what others will not do. It is no wonder that a man of sham faith will not sacrifice anything for the sake of it; because in reality he does not see the good of it. The man who possesses real faith—faith unfeigned—will sacrifice anything for it. He will be like the apostle Paul, who counted all things but dung, that he might win Christ. Others may not take so strong a view meantime; but we may rest assured they will rue their weak views in that day when Christ, who died and rose again, appears once more on the earth, and sends his summons to all the kings of the earth, to make way for God’s kingdom. When the time comes to put the wealth of the sinner into the hands of the just; to pull down the mighty from their seats, and to exalt those of low degree; to show the world what real wealth is, and what true immortality is; when that time comes, people who do not now agree with Paul, will then see what they have lost.

Taken from: - "The Christadelphian" of 1869
Sunday Morning No. 15
Pages 362-368
By Bro. Robert Roberts