

MEDITATIONS ON THE WAYS OF THE DEITY

NO. X

“With tears”—“I ceased not to warn everyone night and day’ (Acts 20:31). Why the tears? Paul realised the incomparable value of the truth. He knew that for his brethren to abandon the doctrines that he had delivered to them meant their non-approval at the judgment seat. He knew, too, the all too willing ear which human nature has for the seducer and corruptor. For this Paul was in continual heaviness—he ceased not to warn (Phil. 3:18; 1 Thes. 3:5–6; 2 Cor. 2:4; 11:28). Is there less reason for sorrow, anxiety, and warning to-day than in the first century? Are the dangers to those in the truth less? Is man more prone to walk in wisdom’s ways? To these questions Christ’s words form an answer—“When the Son of Man cometh shall he find *the* faith on the earth?” Then let us not be indifferent and callous to each other’s standing in the truth. Let us continually think of Paul’s example, and cease not to provoke one another unto love and good works.

The body is body of sin (Rom. 6:6). To allow it to rule means death. Where it reigns there are visible: bitterness, lying, pride, vanity, selfishness, anger, lust. The body can be held in subjection but only in one way, viz., by the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. When heat is brought to bear upon metal, its appearance becomes changed; remove the heat, and the metal gradually returns to its normal condition. So it is with the body. Just so long as the influence of the Bible is allowed to operate upon it is it kept under. Remove that influence and the flesh again asserts itself. The flesh is naturally powerful and asserting. God is testing it by means of the flesh. Happy is the man who knows and realises this. He is on his guard God could create impeccable and immortal beings straight away. He does not do so because He requires character; and character is developed by contact with evil.

“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). It is possible to become a castaway after having known, yea, and appreciated, the truth. Paul keenly recognised such a possibility even in regard to himself But not only does the Bible speak plainly as to the possibility, our own personal knowledge sorrowfully impresses the truth. If we go back twenty, ten, or even four years we can recall the apostacy of not only the semi-warm, but the zealous and self-sacrificing. It seems incredible that such should have departed from us and have let slip the only true hope under heaven. But it is a fact, and a fact which we do well to ponder. What has been the case in the experience of others may be the case with ourselves. Let us therefore “be not high-minded, but fear.” Let the precept “take heed,” be bound as a frontlet to our eyes. Paul was successful—he kept the faith until his course was finished. He has left on record the secret of his success. His words are:—“I buffet my body and bring it into bondage, lest by any means after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected” (1 Cor. 9:27) (R. V.).

If we wish to effectually serve Christ let us pay supreme regard to our own conduct. A careless walk interferes materially with the duties of those in the truth. It not only forms a bad example—and example is by no means an unimportant element in the work of the truth—but it robs us of our courage in speaking to others. For a brother to speak with effect he must be sincere, and to be sincere he must be consistent. Who could exhort others to meditate day and night upon the word when he himself was indifferent to it? Or to shun the carnalising amusements of the godless world whilst he himself indulged in them? Or to love the brethren whilst he himself fostered hatred towards a particular one? Or to resist not evil whilst he himself fights tooth and nail to secure his rights? Or to be benevolent when he himself is covetous? Or to forsake not assembling together when he himself is often absent? A few may be clever enough to act the double character for a time. But it cannot last long (1 Jno. 2:19), and whilst it does the Spirit repudiates the service (Ps. 50:16–23).

“I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not” (Rev. 2:21). These are solemn words. They indicate the unchanging way of the Deity towards apostates from the truth. He first warns, then waits, and finally, in the event of no reformation, abandons. Those who are now professing God’s truth are by this passage brought face to face with a question of overwhelming moment. It is beyond denial that with some He must be more than displeased. His command to be of one mind (1 Cor. 1:10, etc.), is being frequently violated—a state of active antagonism prevails. That God would strengthen the two contending sides is not to be thought of. God could not long remain with both—though He might for a time. Separation from God is the

certain outcome for one or the other—however much it may now glory in peace and prosperity. It is simply a question as to which side God will continue to co-operate with—with the one which maintains, by word and act the absolute integrity of His revelation, or with the one which connives at the conduct of those who impugn its veracity? Now is the time to reflect—the space given for repentance.

No dogs, so the Apocalypse tells us, will be allowed to enter the holy city—the new Jerusalem (22:15). What does this mean! The symbol is taken from the preceding Scriptures which form the key to the Apocalypse. Dogs, under the Mosaic law were among the unclean animals, which were set apart to Israel for a figure of the idolatrous nations from which they had been separated (Lev. 20:23, 25.) Christ alluded to the Gentiles as dogs (Mark 8:27.) Israelites, who were Gentiles in practice, were similarly styled (Phil. 3:2.) In fact the term is used to represent the wicked generally—all who are uncircumcised in heart (Matt. 8:6; Psalms. 22:16, 23.) To say that no dogs will have a place in the city is equivalent to saying that no one out of covenant-relation hope with God—no one unregenerate in mind—will enter. To be a natural descendant of Abraham, or to be nominally in Christ will not satisfy the divine conditions. To truly pass from clean to unclean—from Gentilism to Israelitism—it is necessary to keep the commandments of God. The outward observance of forms apart from this is of no avail (I Cor. 7:19.) “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter into the city.”

When Christ is enthroned in Jerusalem Israel will be the first nation to enter (Abrahamically) into covenant relationship with God. Other nations will follow as is implied in Zec. 2:11, but Israel—honoured, favoured, and beloved for the Father’s sake—will be the chief. During the Millennium, the nations will be as the brethren of Christ now are—heirs awaiting judgment. The Deity’s purpose concerning them is contained in the covenant made with Abraham—“In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” This covenant in its ultimate realisation involves the immortalisation of all in the human family who will have manifested the character of Abraham, and it also involves their joint inheritance of the earth as an everlasting possession. This is hope, and it is the hope of the future. It was the hope of Abraham and of all the intervening generations. It is the hope which enables man to endure (whilst pursuing the path divinely marked out) the scoffs, jeers, and persecutions of the wicked, and to forego the pleasures of a transitory present. It is the hope that has brightened the dreary pilgrimage of all the truly good. It is the hope that will make in the day to come, God’s people of all times one united family.

“Ye that are the Lords remembrancers, keep not silence, and give Him no rest till He establish and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.” (Is. 62:7. R.V.) In the light of this requirement, how lamentably wanting is the Church of England! Its “prayer to Almighty God upon the completion of fifty years of her Majesty’s reign” contains no reference whatever to the coming and reign of Christ—there is no yearning for the fulfilment of these events, and no gratitude for the hope that the Scriptures give in relation to them. The Church is ignorant, and therefore hopeless! “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,” and so whilst silent concerning the only true hope, it pours forth the petition: “Let there never be one wanting in her (the Queen’s) house to receive the sceptre of our United Kingdom, that our posterity may see her children’s children, and peace upon the Israel of God.” What a contrast to the thoughts and aspirations of the saints! Strong desires for a continuance of the powers that be, but no mind to exclaim “Come, Lord Jesus.” What brother or sister could defile him or her self by co-operating in the prayers of such a Church! True saints are “waiting for the consolation of Israel”—“looking for redemption in Israel”—“waiting for the Kingdom of God”—and hence their daily prayer is: “Have respect unto the covenant.”

“I know” is indicative of a spiritually sound and healthy condition. Doubt in relation to the things that God has spoken effectually retards growth. Man is certain to give the “go by” to Bible requirements, if left to be his own arbiter as to what they are. The truth is a power to him who believe it, not to the unbelieving or hesitating. Its calls oftentimes involve the sacrifice of comfort, social position, reputation, means of livelihood, and even life itself. Ability to obey these calls comes through a persuasion that they have been imposed by God. Nothing more surely produces this confidence, and nothing more quickly undermines it than our convictions in regard to the unerringness or otherwise of God’s revelation. The theory of error in that revelation paves the way for innumerable perplexities; it leads to everyone doing that which is right in his own eyes. Erring man wants an unerring guide, and this is what the Bible claims to be:—“My mouth shall speak truth” (Prov. 8:7); “Thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth” (Isa. 25:1); “Thy Word is true from the beginning” (Ps. 119:160); “That which was written was upright, even words of truth” (Ecc. 12:10); “The Scripture of truth” (Dan. 10:21); etc. When the Bible itself explains “true” as meaning partly untrue, then, and not until then, may we cease to contend for the absolute sense of the word.