

***"Let those that fear thee turn unto me,  
and those that have known thy testimonies."***

Psalm 119:79

As the believer finds trouble from the world, he prays that he may find help from the Lord's people. The very sight of our Father's family is cheering. It brings not only fellowship but help. For the wise distribution of gifts in the body--each having his own gift--was ordained for the mutual help and sympathy of the several members. (1 Cor. xii. 7. Eph. iv. 15, 16.) It is painful therefore to see Christians often walking aloof from each other, and suffering coldness, distance, differences and distrust to divide them from their brethren. Who then will not pray, that he, who has the hearts of all his people in his hand, would *turn the hearts of those that fear him and know his testimonies* unto their brethren? It was the honour of Mordecai, that he was "accepted of the multitude of his brethren." (Esth. x. 3.) In the primitive church, "Demetrius had good report of all men, and of the truth itself" (3 John, 12); and the members of the church generally "did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart; praising God, and *having favour with all the people.*" (Acts, ii. 46, 47.) "Then," as Chrysostom exultingly exclaims, 'the Church was a little heaven.' Then they could say to each other--"Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"<sup>1</sup> and even their Heathen neighbours were awed and constrained into the confession--"See how these Christians love one another."

Alas! that our Jerusalem should no longer exhibit the picture of a "city compact together" (Ps. cxxii. 3)--that so many "walls of partition" should separate brother from brother, so that our Zion has very rarely been exhibited in her "perfection of beauty," when "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." (Ps. l. 2, with Acts, iv. 32.) Prejudice and misconception divided Job from his friends. (Job, vi. 29.) Want of forbearance cankered the union of the members of the church of Rome (Rom. xiv., xv. 1-7), and even prevailed to separate chief friends--Paul and Barnabas. (Acts, xv. 38.) Diversity of sentiment injured the influence of brotherly love at Corinth. (1 Cor. i. 10-12.) And thus it has been in every successive age of the church; so that the full answer to the Redeemer's prayer, and the grand display to the world of the Divine original of the gospel, is yet to be manifested. (John, xvii. 21.) But as "the communion of saints" was the peculiar feature of primitive Christianity, and ever since has formed an article of her faith; in proportion as we return to the primitive standard, we shall hold closer fellowship with each other--as "members of one body" (1 Cor. xii. 12-27)--"considering one another, to provoke unto love and to good works" (Heb. x. 24)--"bearing one another's burdens" (Gal. vi. 2; v. 13);--and "receiving one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God." (Rom. xv. 7.)

Want of Christian self-denial presents the main hindrance to this "keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." But--admitting that some of the brethren are "weak in the faith" in comparison with ourselves--are we then to be 'rolling endlessly the returning

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<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxxxiii. 1. Most truly catholic was the rule of the excellent Philip Henry, and most consistently exemplified in his Christian conduct, determining 'in those things, in which all the people of God are agreed, to spend my zeal; and as for other things about which they differ, to walk according to the light God hath given me, and charitably to believe others to do so too.'--Life, WILLIAMS' Edition, p. 127.

stone,<sup>2</sup> obtruding always the same stumbling-offence upon them? (Rom. xiv. 1.) We are "not to please ourselves" in compelling them to adopt our views; but rather to "receive them, and bear their infirmities." (Rom. xv. 1.) Accursed be that charity, that is preserved by "the shipwreck of faith!" But though scriptural truth must never be denied, there are times when it may be forborne. The Apostle "knew and was persuaded of the Lord Jesus, that there was nothing unclean of itself" (Rom. xiv. 14); yet he would rather allow even the misconception of conscience, until clearer light should be given, than endanger the unity of the church. Liberty must give place to love; and for himself, he would rather restrain himself from lawful indulgence, than hazard the safety of a weaker brother, or turn from one that loved his Saviour. (Rom. xiv. 15, 16. 1 Cor. viii. 13. Comp. Phil. iii. 15, 16.) Wherever, therefore, in the judgment of Christian charity, we discover those "that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity" (Eph. vi. 24. Comp. 1 John, iii. 14), we must be ready to give them our very hearts, to view them as brethren, as one with ourselves, and to welcome them with brotherly love, as those whom, with all their infirmities, Jesus "is not ashamed to call his brethren." (Heb. ii. 11, 12.) We must be ready to *turn to them*, as those *that fear God, and have known his testimonies*.

And does not the believer's anxiety for the company and assistance of the Lord's people rebuke Christian professors, who are far too closely linked to the society of the world? Surely, if the lovely attraction of many of its most avowed votaries can compensate for the absence of their Saviour's image, they can have but little relish for that heavenly enjoyment, which unites the children of God together in close and hallowed communion with God. And do we not see a proof of the deteriorating influence of this worldly spirit, in their readiness to feel disgust at the infirmities of the real brethren of the Lord, and to neglect the image of Christ in them, from the unsightliness of the garb, which may sometimes cover it?

But let us mark the completeness of the Christian--combining the fear with the knowledge of God. Knowledge without fear would be self-confidence. Fear without knowledge would be bondage. But *the knowledge of his testimonies*, connected with *an acquaintance with his ways*, molds the character of men of God into the spirit of love; and qualifies them, "as fathers" (1 John, ii. 13, 14) in the gospel, to counsel the weak and inexperienced. Should we, however, be excluded from the privilege of their intercourse; or should they be prevented from *turning unto us*; may it not be the appointed means of leading us to a more simple dependence on Divine teaching and grace, and to a more blessed anticipation of our Father's house in heaven, where all will be harmony, peace, and love? 'We shall carry truth and the knowledge of God to heaven with us; we shall carry purity thither, devotedness of soul to God and our Redeemer, Divine love and joy, if we have these beginnings here, with whatsoever else of permanent excellence, that hath a settled, fixed seat and place in our souls now: and shall there have them in perfection. But do you think we shall carry strife to heaven? shall we carry anger to heaven? Envyings, heart-burnings, animosities; shall we carry these to heaven with us? Let us labour to divest ourselves, and strike off from our spirits everything that shall not go with us to heaven, or is equally unsuitable to our end and way, that there may be nothing to obstruct and

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2 Morning Exercises, Oct. 1682.

hinder our "abundant entrance" at length into the everlasting kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

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3 HOWE'S *Works*, vol. iv. 126, 127--'It will be one of the felicities of heaven,' (as Milner sweetly remarks upon the prejudices subsisting between Bernard and the supposed heretics of his day), 'that saints shall no longer misunderstand each other.'--MILNER'S *History of the Church*, iii. 384.