

CHAPTER 12

Everybody knows the little girl who, having heard her father complain that his watch needed cleaning, stole away to clean it in a basin of soapsuds! The story is but a grotesquely exaggerated instance of what we all suffer from--ignorant zeal, unintelligent desire to please. No one but a brute would vent his anger on his baby, when, with eyes sparkling and cheeks flushed at the thought of having done a kind and useful service, she brings him his ruined watch. But if this were done by one who ought to have known better, no such restraint would be called for. To this everyone will assent. But no one seems to take account of similar considerations in our relations with the Deity.

"The chief end of man is to glorify and enjoy himself forever." Such is the present-day reading of the first great thesis in the catechism of the Westminster Divines.¹ And to attain this end, man wants a religion and a god, just as a prince needs a private chaplain. But a chaplain should know his place and not intrude where his presence would be embarrassing. And so with God. It is intolerable that He should claim to decide in what way alone we can please Him. In leading moral and religious lives, we "render to God the things that are God's." And we must not forget what is due to ourselves. But "the chief end of man is to glorify GOD." This is what the Westminster Divines really wrote; but that was long ago, and the Westminster Divines were ignorant and knew nothing of "the gospel of humanity"!

In a word, God claims our homage, and we offer Him our patronage. He claims the undivided devotion of our life, and we offer Him religion and morality. But God does not want our patronage. Neither does He want either our morality or our religion. "Monstrous!" the reader will exclaim, preparing to throw down the volume. "Is it a matter of indifference whether we are moral and religious, or not?" By no means a matter of indifference as regards *ourselves*; not even as to our life on earth, to say nothing of the judgment to come. But of supreme indifference to God. The man who struts about inflated by the conceit begotten of humanity gospels is like the Jew who supposed he was doing the Most High a benefit when he piled "the fat of fed beasts" (Isa. 1:11) upon His altar--the altar of the "God who made the world and all things that are therein."

Strange though it may seem, God has a purpose and a will; and He is so unreasonable as to require the recognition of that purpose and compliance with that will. But these are matters of revelation and, therefore, here once again the ways divide. Human religion in every phase of it is of interest to men, and books about it will be read, noticed, and discussed. But Christianity is a Divine revelation and therefore, to use a popular vulgarism, it is "boycotted." But in the great truths of Christianity, now so little known, is to be found the only true philosophy, the only true solution of the deeper problems of life, which so perplex and grieve us.

God's judgments are righteous. And the principles which govern them are clearly stated:

¹ "The Scotch Catechism" it is commonly called, as though Westminster were somewhere north of the Tweed! This catechism was compiled by pious and learned "Dons" of Cambridge University, and adopted by "an assembly of learned and godly divines" convened in Westminster Abbey.

He "will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life" (Rom. 2:6,7). Who will question the equity of this? The story is told of Bishop Wilberforce, that a Hampshire railway porter, a hedge² theologian of local fame, tried to pose him with the question "What is the way to heaven?" "The way to heaven?" said the bishop, as the train in which he was seated moved out of the station--"turn to the *right* and keep straight on!" But what is the right? This is the vital question. And this every man claims to settle for himself. Whatever reason and conscience declare to be right *is* right--this is a maxim almost universally accepted. And in the absence of a revelation it is, within certain limits, practically true. But when the Supreme makes known His will, compliance with that will becomes the test of well-doing.

In the Mosaic economy, religion and morality had prominence. And in the cult of Christendom, which in one aspect of it is but a corrupted form of Judaism disguised by Christian phraseology, religion and morality are everything. But the era of religion and morality is past. These were like guides which were followed in the darkness till the goal was reached to which they led. The Mosaic economy was a state of tutelage which ended with the coming of Christ. To set up morality and religion now is to bring ourselves within the denunciation of the words which follow in the passage quoted: "But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath." Hence the Lord's reply to the question, "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" "This," He replied, "is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He has sent" (John 6:28,29). "Then a man may be as immoral as he likes provided only he 'believes,' as you call it." Such is the rejoinder of the contentious. Such was the criticism of those who heard His words. Reason told them it was wrong, and clinging to their morality and religion instead of believing in "the Sent One," they crucified Him.

To set up an altar "to an unknown God" is the highest possible attainment of natural religion. But as St. Paul said at Athens (Acts 17:22-31), even the light of nature should teach men that God does not want our service or our patronage, "as though He needed anything." He wished men to seek Him, even though they had need to grope for Him blindly and in darkness--"to feel after Him and find Him." And He could give them blessing in spite of ignorance, for "He is a rewarder of diligent seekers." If they but "turned to the right and kept straight on," He could, as St. Paul declared, overlook the ignorance. "But now," he goes on to say, "He commands all men everywhere to repent." And the change depends on this--that God has revealed Himself in Christ, and therefore ignorance of His will is sin that shuts men up to judgment. A new era has dawned upon the world. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." The darkness is past, the true light is shining. To turn now to conscience or to law--to religion and morality--is to act like men who, with the sun in the zenith, keep shutters barred and curtains drawn. The principle on which God deals with men is the same, but the measure of man's responsibility is entirely changed. Such was the great truth so plainly stated by our Divine Lord in His words to Nicodemus. This, He declared, was the condemnation, not that men's deeds were evil--though for these there shall be wrath in the day of wrath--but

² Prefixed to any word, it "notes something mean, vile, of the lowest class".

that because their deeds were evil, they had brought upon themselves a still direr doom; light had come into the world, but they turned from it and *loved* darkness.

Men cannot and will not believe that the great controversy between them and God is altogether about Christ. To most men, indeed, the very statement seems to savor of mysticism. The death of Christ is one of the commonplaces of the philosophy, as well as of the theology, of Christendom. Men boast of it as the highest tribute to human worth. But God's estimate of it is vastly different.

"The Son of God has died by the hands of men! This astounding fact is the moral center of all things. A bygone eternity knew no other future; an eternity to come shall know no other past. That death was the world's crisis. For long ages--despite conscience outraged, the light of nature quenched, law broken, promises despised, and prophets cast out and slain--the world had been on terms with God. But now a tremendous change ensued. Once for all the world had taken sides. In the midst stood that cross in its lonely majesty: God on one side with averted face; on the other Satan, exulting in his triumph. And the world took sides with Satan."³

And in presence of that cross God calls upon everyone to whom the record comes to declare himself on the one side or the other. But men struggle to evade the issue. Many, of course, ignore it altogether in a selfish or a vicious life; but not a few attempt a compromise by turning to religion. But so far as this supreme question is concerned, the result is the same for all. What the end will be of those who never heard of Christ we know not. But there is neither reserve nor mystery in Scripture as to what the portion will be of those who "obey the gospel" and of those who reject it. Upon that choice depends the eternal destiny of each. Hence the virulence with which the Bible is attacked; for if Christ be beyond our reach, our responsibility is at an end. Some there are indeed who affect personal devotion to Him though they disparage or despise the Scriptures. But every thoughtful person recognizes that it is only through the record that we can reach the person, that it is only through the written Word that we can reach the Living Word. Hence His declaration, "He who rejects Me and receives not My words has one that judges him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

The consequences, then, of accepting or rejecting Christ are eternal. No other question is open. Morality! In morals, as in physics, the greater includes the less, and the gospel teaches a higher morality than conscience and law combined. But in this Christian dispensation God is not imputing their sins to men. Were it otherwise, the silence of Heaven would give place to the thunders of His judgments. Every question of judgment was either settled forever at the Cross or has been postponed to the day that is still to come. God "knows how...to reserve the unjust to the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Pet. 2:9). And the day of judgment is not yet.

A red-letter day it must have seemed to the village community of Nazareth when the great

³ "The Gospel and its Ministry," p. 12.

Rabbi who had grown to manhood in their midst reappeared in their synagogue and stood up to read the Sabbath lesson from the Prophets (Luke 4:16-22). Opening the roll delivered to Him, He found the passage beginning, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord-----"; and abruptly closing the book, He handed it back to the attendant and sat down. Having stood forward to read the lesson for the day, He stopped in the middle of the opening sentence. What wonder that all eyes were fastened on Him! "This day," He broke the silence by declaring, "is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."

"And the day of vengeance of our God" were the words that followed without a break on the open page before Him; but He left those words unread. "The acceptable year of the Lord" He then and there proclaimed, and it still runs its course, but the great day of judgment is even now still future.

Not that the moral government of the world is in abeyance. Even here and now men reap what they sow. Righteousness prospers and iniquity brings its own penalty. Not always indeed, nor openly, but generally and with sufficient definiteness to make it clear that this is the rule--the ordinary course of things. And further, in the Divine economy provision is made for human government; and the sword is entrusted to men that rulers may be a terror to the evildoer and a protection to the good. Were it otherwise, society would be impossible. But while men are thus empowered to punish offenses against human laws, the judgment of *sin* is altogether with God.

And here we recall another declaration of our Divine Lord. "The Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment unto the Son." "We believe that Thou shalt come to be our judge" is upon the lips of thousands who in their hearts imagine that He will mediate in the judgment between them and an offended God. But it is to the crucified One Himself that in virtue of the Cross the Divine prerogative of judgment as been assigned. And He, the sinner's only Judge, is now the sinner's Savior. Purification for sins accomplished, He has "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3). The official attitude of Christ, if such a phrase may be allowed, is one of rest. The work of redemption is complete. The great amnesty has been proclaimed. Heaven is thrown open to the lost of earth. Eternal life is brought within the reach of the weakest and the worst of men. God is not imputing trespasses, but preaching peace. And the only Being in the universe who has power to punish sin is now seated on the throne of God as Savior, and His presence there has changed that throne into a throne of grace. Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life; for "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."⁴

"How monstrous all this is! The idea of supposing that people who have consistently lived religious lives are to be shut out of heaven, while the worthless and depraved can obtain forgiveness and acceptance simply by believing in Christ!" Such will be the criticism these

4 See Appendix, Note IX.

statements will generally evoke. Monstrous it may seem. But before men hold it up to censure or ridicule, let them pause and reflect what it is that they are thus rejecting. "To Him bear all the prophets witness that through His name everyone who believes on Him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43, R.V.). Nor is it a dogma of "Pauline doctrine," but the teaching of one of the simplest parables of Christ--that waifs and tramps from the highways and the slums sit down in the Kingdom of God, while the once invited guests--the moral and religious--are excluded (Luke 14:15-24). And the parable is explained by the doctrine that His Divine mission was "not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."