

us from quiet contemplation, seasons of restful thought, the daily summoning to the bar of our conscience of what we have done and thought. To many, pencil and paper will help this necessary practice. But when once the habit is formed and scrupulously kept up, conscience will be quick to remember and to remind. And if we ask, according to what standard are we to conduct our self-examination? the answer is most plain: "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no wise enter therein." The time when our faith was simplest, when our acceptance of the word of God was most direct, when we were most under our mother's influence, that was the best time with us. The more we can, by God's infinite pity and grace, in spite of our wilfulness and wandering and worldliness, and acquaintance with evil, recover of that spirit, that blessed simplicity, that calm unquestioning trustfulness, the better it will be for us here and hereafter. The quiet season of retirement and self-recollection has once more come to offer us its benignant gifts. It is a season which to all should be of the deepest solemnity. It is a season which God's mercy fashions for bringing you nearer to Him. If you have alighted this duty before, there can be no difficulty, will you but ask the help of the Holy Spirit, in fixing your minds on your own characters and conduct during this time of refreshment, when the world draws back for a while. You may find much to disappoint and surprise. But if God be with you, you will also discover ground for hope and encouragement.

PLEASING GOD AND MEN.

PROFESSOR CLARK'S ORDINATION SERMON AT ST. ALBAN'S, ON SUNDAY, MARCH 14TH.

I. Thess. ii. 4: "Not as pleasing men, but God which proveth our hearts."

I. Corinth. x. 33: "I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved."

We have often been struck by the apparent contradictions—paradoxes—which occur in human speech. These paradoxes are by no means infrequent in the sacred Scriptures; and some have hastily inferred that there are in these sacred writings irreconcilable contradictions. Those, however, who go somewhat more deeply into these conflicting statements, will find out that not only are they capable of reconciliation; but that, if we are to grasp the whole truth, we must approach it from both sides, and we shall find that the counter proposition, the statement that is placed over against the first, only serves to define more exactly the proposition which it seemed to oppose.

An example may be found in the statements of St. Paul and St. James on the subject of justification. As they stand, they flatly contradict each other, and writers who have not seen far into the nature of spiritual truth, have declared them to be manifestly contradictory; whereas those who have deeply meditated all the meaning and the different aspects of the meaning contained in words like faith and justification, find no contradiction whatever between the one and the other.

So, I believe, we shall find the case to be in the two texts before us—the first of which declares that St. Paul and his fellow workers make it their business not to please men, but God; and the second, that in all things he pleases all men. These two representations of Christian life, taken together, will supplement each other, and will bring out corresponding truths of the greatest importance in Christian life and work. They are applicable not merely to the clergy, to those who are now being ordained, or who have already been ordained, but to every Christian man and woman; and to the laity in a twofold manner. For they tell them not merely

what the spirit of their own life should be, but how they may, by encouraging this spirit, strengthen the hands of those who are set over them in the Lord.

I. First, then, the Apostle tells us that *Christian ministers are not to be men pleasers, but pleasers of God.*

From the very beginning of the work of Jesus Christ, and even before that time, the claims of God and the world have been contrasted. He told us that we could not serve God and the world; and His disciples have reminded us over and over again that we are not of the world, and that the friendship of the world is enmity with God. Moreover, it is implied that a considerable struggle is involved in the triumph of the faith of the Christian over the world. "Do I seek to please men?" asks St. Paul. "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."

We do not forget that the "world" of our day is not the world of St. Paul or St. John. The public opinion of our own times is deeply penetrated with the spirit of the Gospel; yet there is ever a leaven of self which is not altogether purged out; and in all ages, even in the best ages of the Church, it would not have been safe to assume that the pleasing of men would also be the pleasing of God; and Christian preachers have always had to be on their guard lest they should be pleasing men and displeasing God. It is reported of Massillon, the great French preacher, that, on one occasion, after his sermon, Louis XIV. remarked to him: "My Lord, you displeased me to-day;" and that the preacher answered: "It was what I wished to do." But still better and well authenticated is the testimony borne by the same monarch to the same preacher: "My Lord," he said, "when I hear other preachers, they make me satisfied with them; but when I hear you, you make me dissatisfied with myself." The great preacher remembered the example of St. Paul—not as pleasing men, but God. It is, in fact, necessary to remember this rule in all ages and in all circumstances; for the temptation will present itself to us all—the same in principle, although it may differ greatly in form. Even in our own days we, Christians and Christian ministers, often encounter this temptation and probably sometimes succumb to it.

Note what the Apostle is specially referring to in this passage. He says: "As we have been approved of God to be entrusted with the Gospel, so we speak;" and this they do, he says, "not as pleasing men, but God." Now, my brethren, can we say that there is for ourselves no temptation to present the Gospel in such a manner that it shall please men and not God. Has the offence of the cross ceased? Those who imagine that there is no such temptation, must have either a limited experience or a very partial acquaintance with what the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ demands.

Think for a moment what the Gospel requires us to proclaim. Among other things it declares the sinfulness of the whole human race, that all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; that we need pardon, the remission of our guilt, and assistance for our weakness—grace to help in every time of need, that the mercy of God has been revealed in the work of Jesus Christ, and that He is the way, the truth and the life—that no one cometh unto the Father but by Him.

Now, of course, there are people who would like most of these doctrines to be suppressed. But we are not thinking of such persons, who are not likely to have much influence with preachers of the Gospel, inasmuch as they are not commonly found in our churches. But apart from these, there seems to be a very considerable body of Church-goers who want to reduce the sermon to its scantiest proportions, who would very gladly dispense with any frequent reference to the man-humbling and Christ-exalting truths of the Gospel, who would prefer an essay to a sermon, anecdotes fitted to amuse rather than to edify, instead of appeals to the conscience, and in short practically abolish what St. Paul would call the preaching of the Gospel.

Let us ask ourselves, if we could follow such a course, should we then be pleasing men or God?

Could we, with a good conscience, lay work of that kind before the face of Jesus Christ and ask for His approval and blessing? Can those who read the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament have any hesitation as to their answer?

But this is not the only form of the temptation by which the preacher is sometimes assailed. We are not only tempted tacitly to ignore the doctrines of redemption and regeneration, which is to preach another Gospel, which is not really good news at all; we are also tempted to lower the demands which the Gospel makes upon the wills—the lives of all who lay hold upon its promises.

Of the stringent and universal nature of these demands there can be no question. The Christian is commanded to yield himself unto God—body, soul and spirit. He is told that God must be his only Master. He is to die with Christ, to be crucified with Christ, and to rise and live with Christ. And all this is declared to be his reasonable service.

Now, let it be observed, there is here no unreasonable asceticism, no so-called counsel of perfection, requiring us to abjure property, or the married state, or the governance of our own life. We may eat, and we may drink, but we must do all to the glory of God. We may hold the property which God may have given us; but we must hold it as the stewards of God—as those who must give account.

"We need not bid, for cloistered cell,
Our neighbour or our work farewell."
Ourselves and all that we call our own must be consecrated to the service of God.

Are there no temptations to lower these demands of the Gospel? We should be sorry for men and women who had never felt them. It is, on the contrary, the one ever present temptation that we should attempt to make some compromise between the world and God. In fact, men think themselves wiser than God, and tell us not to be righteous over much, when God has told us to be perfect as our Father is perfect, and that we shall find our true happiness in our likeness to Him. On the one side we see here the pleasing of men, on the other, the pleasing of God; and the duty of the Christian, and especially of the Christian teacher is, here as always, to set forth the mind of Christ, and not to adopt the thoughts and inclinations of men. And in this connection, let it be specially noted that it is easier to please God than it is to please men—or to put it in another form, we may make sure of pleasing God, if we will; but we can never be quite sure of being able to please men. Does this need proof? A moment's reflection will satisfy us on the point.

We are never quite sure what men want. In one place and at one time they want one thing; at another, another. If we toil with all our might, we may be positively unable to provide what they want. If we provide it we are by no means sure that they will be satisfied. If for the moment they are contented, we are never sure that they will not immediately ask for something quite different. Are these theories or speculations of ours? On the contrary, they are verified by the whole history of the world and the experience of men. The air is full of the lamentations and complaints of men who have sought to serve their fellow-men, and have found them ungrateful. No, we can never be quite sure that we are pleasing men, or that we shall please them, or that we are capable of pleasing them.

But—and let us mark this—we may be quite sure as to our pleasing God. To really intend to please God is verily to please Him. Where there is a true heart, a sincere purpose, the offering is acceptable and accepted by Him. "If there be first a ready mind," says St. Paul, "it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." And these words have a great extent of application. God expects from us only that which He has first given us. We are not infallible, and we are not omnipotent. We may even make great mistakes with regard to the exact nature of the duty required of us at any particular moment. But we need make no mistake as to our purpose and intention; and it is this which pleases God—our will to

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