

SUNDAY
SCHOOL

The Quiet Hour

YOUNG
PEOPLE

FALSE AND TRUE DISCIPLESHIP.*

By G. Campbell Morgan, D.D.

This searching word lies at the centre of the final utterances of the Manifesto. It completely cuts away the false foundations upon which men are so prone to build. There is no heresy more widespread or more disastrous than the idea that saying "Lord, Lord" is everything. In these words Christ declared that such confession of His Lordship in itself is not the passport to the kingdom. Intellectual orthodoxy has no value. A Christo-centric creed is worthless. The admission that Jesus is King does not save. The most accurate and complete understanding of the truth does not necessarily result in loyalty. To orthodoxy of intellect there must be added the submission of the will. The creed must be translated into conduct. The admission of Kingship must be accompanied by loyalty. The truth must be allowed to triumph. All this means that life in the Kingdom of God is both serious and strenuous.

The teaching lying immediately around the declaration illustrates and enforces this fact. This whole paragraph is of the nature of a final appeal. The enunciation of the laws of the Kingdom is already complete, and the last words of the King are those of invitation and of warning.

His invitation to enter the Kingdom is a remarkable one in that He makes it perfectly clear that the gate of entrance is narrow, while the gate through which those pass who refuse to submit is wide. This invitation, when carefully examined, presents to the mind the two ways, those, namely, of submission and of rebellion, and they are contrasted both with regard to their beginning and to their end.

The beginning of the way of submission is narrow and straitened; but it leads to life which is broad and spacious. The beginning of the way of rebellion is broad and spacious, but it leads to destruction, which is narrow and straitened.

The completeness of this contrast is often lost sight of. We are prone to think of the way of loyalty to the Kingship of God as being characterized entirely by narrowness. Indeed, it is one of the most common criticisms of the Christian life by men of the world, that it is narrow. It is certainly true that no man can submit himself to the Kingship of God and walk in the way of His will save by passing through a gate so narrow that all must be left on the other side; but it is equally true that having passed through the narrow gate, and begun to tread the straitened way, life broadens in every respect, and comes to full and final completeness.

On the other hand, men in rebellion against God consider that in freedom from restraint they are able to see life in all its breadth; but it is well to remember that such false freedom inevitably issues in the forging of chains, and the ultimate slavery and destruction of those who choose thus to be a law unto themselves.

Having thus uttered His invitation, the King warned those to whom He spoke against being deceived by false prophets, that is, such as are of the nature of the wolf which destroys the sheep, even though they masquerade in the clothing of sheep. Prophets are to be tested by their fruit. That is to say, their nature is revealed in the result of their teaching. The point of this warning is not that these men are to be tested by what they themselves

appear to be, for the sheep's clothing may entirely deceive. The test is an unfalling one. However successfully the terminology of the Kingdom may be used, and its habit imitated, it is impossible to produce in other lives the character described in the opening Beatitudes save by those who are themselves loyal to the King, and share His life.

The next word of warning is of the most solemn description, and shows how possible it is to be self-deceived. There are those who in the final day of the King's crowning will claim to have prophesied by His name, by His name to have cast out devils, and done many mighty works. It must be borne in mind that this will be their own estimate. To admit that these things have been accomplished would be to contradict the teaching of the previous passage. The King's answer to them is a revelation of the fact that they were self-deceived, not only with regard to themselves, but with regard to the work which they have accomplished. He declares that He never knew them, and speaks of them as of those who work iniquity. The teaching of this warning is that work for the King is of no value apart from the realization of His will in character.

The closing words of the Manifesto constitute a claim full of dignity. To hear His saying and to do them is to build upon a rock foundation, and that so strongly that no storms can destroy the building. To hear His words and refuse obedience may be to build, but all such building is on sand, and in the day of storm and tempest it will be irrevocably destroyed.

We are not surprised to read that when Jesus had finished speaking the multitudes—who evidently had followed Him, even though He had departed from them, and gathered His own disciples about Him, were astonished at His teaching. That which filled them with amazement was the invariable authority of everything which He had said. The contrast which they suggested was between His teaching and that of their own scribes. This fact is most illuminative when it is remembered that the scribes were the authoritative teachers of the time. The difference consisted in the fact that their interpretation of law often failed to carry conviction to those who heard; whereas every word which fell from the lips of Jesus did then, and still does, make appeal to the conscience of men in virtue of its self-evident truthfulness. The only fair criticism that has ever been offered on the ideals of life set forth in this Manifesto is that they constitute counsels of perfection, in that they present ideals of conduct which man finds himself utterly unable to realize. It must be remembered that this inability was recognized by Christ, and that there must be added to His enunciation of moral law the work He accomplished as Redeemer of men, through which, and through which alone, they have ever been able to fulfil the ideals He presented.

The kingdom is coming. It takes time. Long is the way and hard that out of hell leads up to the light. Everything that God does takes time. The sands of his holy purposes run out slowly, but the kingdom is coming.

Everywhere we find the signature, the autograph of God, and He will never deny His own handwriting. God hath set His tabernacle in the dewdrop as surely as in the sun. No man can any more create the meanest polyp than he could create the greatest world.

Hasty, irritable criticism of a pastor or fellow church member may have more to do with the religious indifference of the boys and girls in the homes of some good people than they would care to admit or recognize.

DRAWING NEAR TO GOD.

Some are far away, and content to remain in the far country. They have no desire to be near to God, and do not like to think of Him. As a disobedient son who has wronged and grieved his father is ashamed and afraid to come into the presence of his father, so the ungodly and disobedient are ashamed and afraid to draw near to God. But He is a loving Father, seeking His lost children, and waiting to welcome every returning penitent.

Some are far away, some are not far from the kingdom, but not quite in it, and some within the gates are following their Lord afar off, while others live in the heart of the heavenly Father. When Jesus lived among men some despised Him and turned their backs upon Him, others heard Him with respect, others still accepted His invitation and followed Him, but a few dwelt in the inner circle close to the heart of their Master. Peter and James and John seemed to understand Him better than the other disciples, and Jesus poured His truth into their hearts because they were so close to Him.

The psalmist says: "It is good for me to draw near to God." In Him there is freedom. Some think godliness is bondage, and the far country appears to them like the land of freedom. Men do not find it so in actual experience. To draw near to God means bondage, but it is a happy bondage like unto the bond that binds husband and wife together. They bend their necks to a yoke, but it is an easy yoke, like that which two kindred souls wear when they become one.

O happy bond that seals my vows

To him who merits all my love.

In God there is rest. Not idleness nor ease, but harmony of soul and life and character. It is the rest which a son finds when he returns from his wanderings and enters into his father's house and love.

Now rest, my long-divided heart,

Fixed on this blissful centre, rest.

Those who draw near to God have a splendid vision. God is light, and walking in the light they can see afar off. It is like the vision from the summit of a high mountain when the atmosphere is clear. The view is transporting. Peter and James and John had such a vision on the mount with Jesus. The vision was so clear that they saw through the thick veil and Moses and Elias seemed drawn near by the telescope of faith. It was good to be there. If anyone would get a clear vision of God and things beyond, let him draw near to God.

It is safe to draw near to God. "He will cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust."

Cover my defenceless head

With the shadow of Thy wing.

It is good to draw near because He is the fountain of life. Life is sweet. But life is not found in the far country. It is poor living there. Life is not found in the abundance of the things which men possess. It is found in God. In Him the soul is at home. —N.Y. Christian Advocate.

PRAYER.

Our Father, we pray Thee to bless all Thy people, that the name of Jesus, and all the reconciling and harmonizing influences that flow from faith in Him, may spread through the world; and that whatsoever perturbations of opinion, and changes of points of view, may be realized as the generations go on, He may still, and that more manifestly every day, be the King of the Ages, and the flow of all men. We pray for all nations and peoples; on our own land, and on our Sovereign, and on all his subjects may there descend more and more of Thy gracious light that the counsels of the nation may make for righteousness and peace and truth; and that all men may realize, and discharge more completely, the duties devolving upon them as citizens of an earthly kingdom, as at the same time subjects of the King of Kings. Amen.

*S.S. Lesson, February 27. False and True Discipleship.

Golden Text.—Matthew vii. 21. "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven."